

DECONSTRUCTION AND THE WORK OF ART

VISUAL ARTS AND THEIR CRITIQUE IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH THOUGHT

MARTTA HEIKKILÄ

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Contents

Acknowledgements vii

Introduction: The Dissemination of Art 1

1 The Muteness and Blindness of Images: Deconstruction and the Work of Art 11

2 Beyond Presence: Form and Figure 41

3 The Frames of the Work of Art 65

4 The *Trait* and Difference: Art between Form and Gesture 125

5 Words and Art: Exemplarity of the Work 195

6 Mimesis as Difference 221

7 The Deconstruction of the Image 239

Conclusion: The Complicated Liaison of Art and Philosophy 273

Bibliography 279

Index 295

About the Author 301

Acknowledgements

This research has been conducted over a period of approximately ten years, during which I have worked as a researcher in Aesthetics at the University of Helsinki, but also, for a shorter time, as a senior lecturer in art theory at the Academy of Fine Arts of the University of the Arts Helsinki. The book is motivated by my long-standing interest in the relation between theories of deconstruction and art, the visual arts in particular. Already in my doctoral dissertation *At the Limits of Presentation: Coming-into-Presence and Its Aesthetic Relevance in Jean-Luc Nancy's Philosophy* (Peter Lang, 2008), the theoretical complexity of Nancy's notion of art appeared as compelling. At the same time, the openness of the deconstructionist concept of art, and in the present treatise, especially the concept of the work of art, pointed to several connections that appeared to be worth a more profound analysis. Although treatises on the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, one of the most central and most debated thinkers of the twentieth century, abound, my observation was that the philosophical scope of the Derridean "work of art" was still largely unexplored.

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Introduction

The Dissemination of Art

In the early 2020s, it seems evident that the concept of the "work of art" has changed or even dispersed in relation to its earlier meanings during the past few decades. The recent modifications of the "work" are reflected both in the practice of visual arts and the philosophy of art, especially in poststructuralist and late modern thinking. Namely, for several recent theorists what exists is no longer an unambiguous, uniform concept of "art" but, ultimately, only particular and singular instances of art. Therefore, the possibility of making general and comprehensive claims about art necessarily becomes an object of research, if we suppose that the intrinsic value and autonomy of art have been questioned, and as for their form, the present works of art are often something else than concrete *objets d'art*. If this is the case, in which ways and through what kinds of conceptual strategies have such changes happened in the contemporary understanding of the visual arts? How to approach, then, the criteria and reception of art that are being redefined? In recent years, even attempts at addressing art on perceptible or aesthetic grounds have largely been cast new light upon, if not abandoned as such. Consequently, it appears that new areas of interest have grown towards examining the contexts of art, like the social or political significance of art and the public.

The topics of the present research focus on the French deconstructive theories of art, born within the poststructuralist tradition of philosophy in the 1960s. As I shall suggest, they have formed a significant part of the movements that showed the way beyond the traditional "aesthetic" schemes of art. To date, deconstructive analyses of works of art that now appear as part of the "anti-aesthetic" notion of art have been explored only relatively rarely. This seems to be the case even if uncountable studies on late modern or "postmodern" conceptions of art have existed since the 1980s, especially in the domains of literature and architecture. This book, however, focuses on

the visual arts, an area that still seems to deserve philosophical discussion. The emergence of new art forms, installations, performances, happenings, added with the expansion of techniques of the "earlier" arts, not only has generated new theories among different professionals of art and art history but also continues to inspire philosophers to look at art in new ways. Therefore, it appears still relevant to inquire what has followed from this development in the theories and practice of art if, at present, instances of art are appreciated primarily as situated events and processes instead of merely limited objects.

Overall, the concept of the "work of art" seems paradoxically both central and unthought-of in philosophical aesthetics. At least, as I see it, it is in need of constant re-evaluation in order to understand what the deconstruction of aesthetics means in poststructuralist philosophy in general, and in Jacques Derrida's (1930–2004) thinking in specific. By bringing out the stakes of Derrida's analyses of works of art, I have tried to clarify the origins and implications of his notions of "art" and the "work of art." It is evident that in Derrida's employment these concepts become philosophically motivated, rather than being merely art-historically descriptive. However, as I suggest, they also touch upon a broader domain, being part of wider discourses of contemporary art. Thus, Derrida's writings of art can be relevant well beyond the scope of a purely deconstructionist inquiry.

Worth closer inspection in the context of deconstruction is, undoubtedly, how the "work of art," the most important theme of this research, resonates with Derrida's more general concept of "work." It is profoundly rooted in his readings of literature and against ideal concepts of the work that aim at delimiting certain categorical entities. In place of the totalizing aspects that, for example, the Hegelian concept of unified art seems to represent, Derrida—together with other recent thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy (b. 1940) and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (1940–2007)—introduces the idea of a radical singularity of art and of works of art. The notion of art's unique, situated existence opens some of the fundamental issues of my research: how to speak philosophically of art that exists always as singular instances, as works? The encounter between the abstract and the singular happens, for example, when Derrida speaks of Vincent van Gogh's *Old Shoes with Laces*, Gérard Titus-Carmel's *Pocket Size Tlingit Coffin* drawings, Antonin Artaud's drawings with inserted texts, Jean-Michel Atlan's paintings *Le Nil* or *Calypso*, Colette Deblé's wash paintings, or various photographs. To be explored in their context are the preconditions and the ways of coexistence required by philosophy and the particular works of art.[1] Is it possible to make general claims of something that is supposedly unique in kind and, as a concept, belongs to the domains of difference and undecidability rather than permanent identity, as Derrida and his fellow philosophers maintain? These

questions have led me to the examination of the ontology and the position of the present ideas of the "work."

Derrida's notion of art seems to both contribute to and reflect on some of the overall motives of deconstructionist philosophy; in which ways it can be said to do so is one of the questions of this research. Is his aim to reveal the unanticipated, even hidden, preconceptions and implications of traditional philosophical concepts and arguments? How to describe and contextualize his critique toward them? In Derrida, as in the work of phenomenological and post-phenomenological philosophers alike, the rethinking of the "tradition" often happens by displaying the oppositions that have dominated philosophical discussion since antiquity—such as the subject and the object, the internal and the external. On such a basis, we may speculate on the style of Derridean criticism of philosophical accounts that structurally rely upon the creation of oppositions and hierarchies: what kind of writing is required from us to reach what falls outside of existing categories? This question becomes tangible in Derrida's considerations of art, where he asks whether we have such things at all, or whether such names ever have correspondence to what they are considered to refer to.

Still, we may well ask if there is a possibility of explaining consistently the span of the "work" in the tradition of French deconstruction. To provide answers, although necessarily only partial ones, the present research is focused on the inquiry on the multiple relations between art and philosophy, particularly in Derrida but also in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe. In broader terms, this means to consider the general possibility of putting art in conceptual terms by the language of philosophy, a problem that has proved compelling in the contemporary context where the practices of visual art themselves have become predominantly conceptual and finally post-conceptual, that is to say, thoroughly conceptual from the beginning. Further, I have set myself to inquire how the poststructuralist notion of visual arts is related to the tradition of the late modern "anti-aesthetics" that is conventionally seen to oppose the principles of the modern "aesthetics." This position is clarified by approaching some of the areas within the modernist tradition that include the specificity of the artistic media and art's aesthetic reception. Against them, deconstructionists have brought to the foreground the issues of language that give rise to the differentiation between the paradigms of art, provided by painting, drawing, and photography, as well as the themes of form and figure, mimesis, and image. At the same time, the scope of Derrida's idea of the work of art can be approached from the perspective of what I see as his most important "methodical" concepts in examining art, namely the frame and the *trait*.

Regarding Derrida's discussion of art, the encompassing and yet evasive meaning of its "deconstruction" is the one constant feature. To focus on the

meanings of deconstruction implies taking a "step back," seeking the conditions behind the concepts associated with the study of the visual arts. Here, the largest single question in Derrida's theory concerns the framing of the concepts of art and the work of art that takes place by defining the object of discourses of painting and beauty. In *The Truth in Painting* (*La Vérité en peinture*, 1978), in particular, his question on framing draws upon the associated problems of the possibility and the impossibility of formulating an ontology of art. However, there is an essential challenge in the task of defining these concepts *per se*: "art" and the "work of art" could not emerge and be thinkable, in Derrida's sense, were they not understood against the endless multiplicity of the instances of art. This viewpoint is related to what Derrida calls the unrestricted, open textuality.

While the motivations behind Derrida's and other deconstructionists' accounts of art are predominantly philosophical, they are also often rooted in a specific art, namely literature since Romanticism and the early modernism of the 19th century. Considering the transformations within the visual arts, essential changes took place especially beginning from the 1960s, when the modes of producing art increased rapidly and changed its reception. Artists relinquished many of their earlier intentions, such as the expression of the author's emotion, and the concepts of progress and autonomy of the tradition of art did not appear as obvious as before, but were rather treated with a distanced attitude and irony. Art after modernism was recognized to be part of its social context and the role of the artist changed, even so that the lone genius or craftsman or -woman became a "participant" instead of a sole author, or even a philosopher: for many, art began to resemble a form of thinking. After the main period of modernism, the criticism of the Romantic cult of genius, already put forward by Friedrich Nietzsche, increased considerably.[2] In Derrida's accounts of art, it is evident that his interest lies more in the outcome of the artistic work and the language it generates than in the artist as an individual or the psychology of the creative work. Together with many of his contemporary thinkers like Roland Barthes, Maurice Blanchot, and Michel Foucault, Derrida has questioned the role of the author as the sole authority of the source of signification in a text. This is also what Barthes' idea of the "death of the author" suggests, namely that the intention of the author is not able to provide any original and final meaning to the work, but the meaning retreats from the work as soon as the author puts it in the text.[3]

The notion of art with a timeless, ahistorical essence was called into question by the development of conceptual art, the aim of which was to interrogate the concept of art itself instead of giving precedence to aesthetic, moral, or even material and technical concerns. Other new forms that criticized the commodification of art included community art, outsider art, the rise of new technical means, such as video art and the use of electronic devices, found

art, land art, street art, and body art. Artists created events in space and time, being ephemeral in nature. Accordingly, the question about the ontology of art and the work leads to an inquiry of relevant conceptual modifications: if art appears not as a crafted, permanent object but rather as a contextualized event, what kind of ontological thinking does it require?

In a situation where the practices of art multiply and expectations of its functions change radically, art's definition turns out to be more complicated than before: art always appears to be in retard with respect to its own concept. From this point of view, Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe explore the instances of art beginning from the idea that their meaning withdraws from words. What happens if we assume that the meaning of an artwork is never simply "there" and present to us, but available in the form of traces that they leave to the spectator?[4]

The deconstructionist account of art originates from the more general idea of the critique of metaphysics of presence. The thinking of being that is not understood as a permanent presence and that remains without any final ground or substance—such as an immutable idea—was already devised by Martin Heidegger in his *Being and Time* (1927) and *Origin of the Work of Art* (1935–1936). The lack of foundation, or the notion that each particular being gives its own foundation, has marked an important point of departure for deconstructionist thinking, as well as many other anti-Hegelian and anti-mimetic tendencies in the philosophy and theories of art in the late 20th century. Here, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of "originary mimesis" and Derrida's "original supplement" are of importance in reflecting on the ground of subjectivity and the origin of art. In the lack of such categories that have ruled the reception of art, we are faced with the question of whether drawing boundaries to art is possible or even sensible, and whether this rather proves an indefinite task.

During the past few decades, the art of painting has undergone significant changes: it is no longer characterized by a unified surface that belonged to the modernist ideal of painting, but often exists in hybrid forms, in which fusion with other art forms and media is a norm. This development has been reflected in relevant theories of art. On such a basis, could we state that the loss of earlier integrity of art's practices has contributed to a need to formulate philosophies that parallel this loss? For many thinkers, such a query has provoked the need to undo concepts that express an idea of totality: subject, world, meaning, and identity.[5] In this vein, Derrida's, and even more explicitly, Jean-Luc Nancy's, thinking of art can be seen as opposite of Hegel's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the "total" or "universal work of art," in which the idea and its sensuous presentation coincide.[6] For Derrida, unlike for Hegel, art is not visible or sensible, but antiaesthetic from the beginning. Although Derrida does not comment on the associated discussion of the "end of art"

directly, he suggests that the unity and identity of both the object and the claims on art, proposed by Hegel, have disappeared.[7]

Along with Derrida, several other poststructuralist philosophers have taken part in the discussion on the conditions of art and the aesthetic that now appear as more open-ended than before. For Jean Baudrillard, for example, reality appears to us in the form of simulacra: all meaning and representations of experience have been replaced by signs and symbols that are merely units of circulation in a structure and therefore devoid of absolute value. This conception annihilates the boundaries between all hierarchies and levels, such as the difference between "true" and "false" or "real" and "imaginary,"[8] being thus related to Derrida's view of culture and its products as thoroughly constructed and historical, rather than stable and eternal in nature.

In the following, it will be argued that deconstruction has influenced the way in which contemporary art appears today theoretically and practically: as a procedural, undefined, and non-categorical phenomenon. Instead of speaking about an essence of "art" or art as a universal and unified concept in the Hegelian sense, is it that we can only refer to how something *works* as a work of art in a certain environment, in a context? In addition, to be asked is how the birth of new art forms has an impact on relevant theories and how to describe the position of deconstructive views in relation to the conceptual changes in the meanings of the "work of art." Is art eligible for theories, or is there always an abyss between their spheres? Such questions crystallize in contemporary art, which makes us reflect upon the nature of artworks: in which way are they sensuous or intellectual, non-conceptual or conceptual—or neither of these as such? How artworks and philosophical discourses encounter each other, and what kind of tension is this encounter fraught with, are thus to be asked. In such a tension, two divergent traditions are also at play, namely the philosophy of art and art research and the theories of art that are based on the examination of particular instances and phenomena of art.[9]

From the deconstructive perspective, one of the compelling questions regarding art is the problem of naming: how can we call something "art" or a "work of art," if any conceivable wholeness or conceptual unity is a matter of convention? What do we decide to name a "work of art," provided it is dependent on a network of innumerable relations in certain kinds of circumstances, like the culture in which it is produced and received, *and*, at the same time, on the philosophical ways of treating it? The question of the conceptual framing of art and other things is thus at the core of this research. The relationship between theory and art proves complex on the condition that the experience of images exceeds the limits of linguistic expression. What kind of presuppositions are, therefore, involved if the medium of different accounts remains the same, namely language? What happens in a situation where the media

are different, as in visual arts with its "mute" images that affect the spectator otherwise than making arguments?

The present research has two principal goals. First, it brings out what is referred to as the "deconstruction of aesthetics" in the work of Jacques Derrida, and to a lesser extent, in that of Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. The second aim is to examine the relationship between the conceptual—philosophical and theoretical—notion of art and the review of concrete, material works of art. Reversely, to be observed is the manner in which art has an influence on philosophical and theoretical concepts in the work of philosophers. Here, deconstructionist concepts participate in raising debates about the concept of art itself, which may result in reconsidering the meaning of art—art that can act alongside philosophy, expand the field of philosophy, and at the same time, bring out the boundaries of conceptual thinking that art is often thought to experiment with.

Although plentiful, deconstructionist analyses about works of art have still remained somewhat marginal in the *œuvre* of the respective philosophers. Several of Derrida's essays on art have been written for a specific occasion, such as exhibition catalogues, and the French-language collection *Penser à ne pas voir* (2013) has brought many of these writings at hand. By contrast, a large number of Nancy's essays on art have long been widely available also as English translations.[10]

ON THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

The first chapter, "The Muteness and Blindness of Images: Deconstruction and the Work of Art," examines the concept of the work of art in the philosophies of Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, as well as art's relation to the tradition of deconstruction that was initially focused on the analysis of language and texts. Under which assumptions do deconstructionist philosophers analyze images, and what is involved in the "deconstruction" of art? Does art offer itself as a form of writing beyond language? To be considered is thus the relationship between art and philosophy and the hypothesis that art cannot be reduced to any discourse, such as language and visibility. This is due to the notion that the concrete, material existence of artistic presentations exceeds the boundaries of any conceptual order. Therefore, art proves to be both "mute" and "blind" by nature. The philosophers in question, Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe, highlight this presumption in their writings concerning portraiture, in which they re-evaluate critically the emphasis on the difference between sensing and thinking, inherent in traditional aesthetics, and the significance of mimesis. In this chapter are introduced the themes of *différance*, trace, *trait*, and text, among others.

Among the concepts of "traditional" aesthetics that Derrida aspires to deconstruct are "form" and "figure" of art that are introduced in the second chapter. These terms refer both to the abstract form of the concept of art and to the figures that art presents. In the hands of poststructuralists, instead of an immutable Idea or Truth in the Platonic sense, form and figure rather relate to a process of becoming that bears an affinity to the Romantic notion of "form in formation." How to give figure to ideas or concepts that lie beyond figure and remain without foundation? For philosophers of deconstruction, the ground of art is not in the representation of the world, but rather in the fact that (the work of) art shows its own presentation. In practice, the foundation and also phenomena of art have become more and more problematic to define, so that they often appear in terms of displacement of figure and form. This inquiry is associated with theories of art that emphasize the idea of process instead of art as representation.

In the three following chapters, "The Frames of the Work of Art," "The *Trait* and Difference: Art between Form and Gesture," and "Words and Art: Exemplarity of the Work," I examine the problem of delimiting art in Derrida's thinking in particular. The main question draws on the possibility to define what the "work of art" is, and what such an attempt implies in the poststructuralist scheme. Both Derrida's most comprehensive books on art, *The Truth in Painting* and *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* (*Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines*, 1991), bring to the fore the question of Derrida's idea of the work of art and its underlying assumptions, but from different paradigms: the concepts of "frame" and the *trait*. The background for the examinations of the "work of art" may be discovered in Derrida's more general thinking of the "work" that appears, for instance, in the book *Dissemination* (*La dissémination*, 1972). To trace the ambiguity inherent in defining the work of art, I analyze Derrida's notions that are linked inextricably to his conception of the work, as is art's affinity with his ideas of writing, text, and supplement. They lead to what I suggest form the three schemes of art in his philosophy: painting, drawing, and photography.

The sixth chapter focuses on the notion of mimesis and its deconstruction. Generally, mimesis refers to the truthful imitation of reality. The poststructuralist conception of mimesis no longer relies on ideas such as similarity, identity, and truth that would provide correspondence between art and reality, but rather on difference and non-identity that make the things of the world distinctive and meaningful. If we suppose that art is without origin that artworks would attempt to imitate and reproduce, what would mimesis involved in their production be like? As Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Georges Bataille, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and René Girard, Derrida, and Lacoue-Labarthe have wanted to show, mimesis understood as rendering the

world like a mirror is not enough to understand the wider possibilities of this concept. Namely, they argue, mimesis itself produces something new to the world; what it creates is not ontologically inferior, as in the Platonic tradition.

In the final, seventh chapter, to be addressed is Derrida's multifaceted idea of the image that draws upon Martin Heidegger, Roland Barthes, and Maurice Blanchot, among others. As Derrida claims, the image is never able to present a totality, nor is it simply an autonomous and self-sufficient "picture" or "object." Rather, the image is intrinsically heterogeneous from the beginning, being a composite of conflicting and irreconcilable parts—therefore, can it ever be gathered into a totality of "work"? Instead of a totality, Derrida suggests, at work in the image is rather its undoing that makes it the site of lost coherence and completion instead of limited picture. To be considered is in what ways Derrida's notion of image is comparable to his idea of the work, and how the image always needs words to be received. Finally, what kind of implications does the notion of the deconstructed image have to contemporary art that has become thoroughly conceptual, even post-conceptual, and thus perhaps reflects the fragmentary world?

NOTES

1. Stephen Melville, "Color Has Not Yet Been Named: Objectivity in Deconstruction," in *Deconstruction in the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, eds. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 41.

2. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 3, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), 122–126 (*Human, All Too Human*, 1878).

3. Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–148 ("The Death of the Author," orig. 1967).

4. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3–27 ("Différance") (*Marges de la philosophie*, Paris: Minuit, 1972, 3–29, "La différence").

5. Cf. Jacques Derrida, e.g., *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) (*De la grammatologie*, Paris: Minuit, 1967).

6. At the same time, it may be relevant to state that drawing boundaries and making judgments without a sovereign instance has been the business of aesthetics since Kant. See Eva Geulen, *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor After Hegel*, trans. James McFarland (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006), 7. As for Nancy's idea of the heterogeneity of art and the arts, see Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), 1–39, 53–55 (*Les Muses*, Paris: Galilée, 1994, 11–70, 94–97).

7. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 255–382, ch. "Restitutions" (*La Vérité en peinture*, Paris: Flammarion, 1978, 291–436). Cf. G. W.

F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art I*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 45–46.

8. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994).

9. Cf. Jean Galard, "L'œuvre exappropriée: Derrida et les arts visuels," in *Un jour Derrida: Actes du colloque* (Paris: Éditions de la Bibliothèque publique d'information / Centre Pompidou, 2006), 89–90.

10. Jacques Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, eds. Ginette Michaud, Joana Masó, and Javier Bassas (Paris: La Différence, 2013). All translations of this book are by Martta Heikkilä, unless stated otherwise. However, an English translation of *Penser à ne pas voir* has been published in March 2021, titled *Thinking Out of Sight: Writings on the Arts of the Visible*, eds. Ginette Michaud, Javier Bassas and Joana Masó, trans. Laurent Milesi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021). Due to the schedule of my book, this translation could not be accommodated in the present text.

Chapter 1

The Muteness and Blindness of Images

Deconstruction and the Work of Art

In the French philosophy of the twentieth century, the fields of philosophy, aesthetics, and theories of art are often deeply intertwined: aesthetics and art are varieties of philosophy and philosophy belongs to aesthetics, to the extent that it is often impossible to separate these realms from one another. In particular, the relation between the conceptual and the sensuous experience has risen to an important position as a topic of phenomenological and post-phenomenological inquiries. From this point of departure, the philosophical interest is not so much in defining art but in what remains undefinable and obscure, even opaque and unobtrusive to be reached by concepts.

In the present chapter, I examine the idea of art in three philosophers within the tradition of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. Of importance are especially their essays written about works of art or, in a more restricted sense, the production or exhibition of a certain artist where the relation between art and language comes to the fore. Generally, it is obvious that language and text are in the focus of deconstructionist philosophers, and the tradition of deconstruction has even emerged for the needs of analyzing texts. I shall argue that image and language are irreducibly intertwined in the production of Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe, as for them art and language are both sites in which differences are produced.

Contrary to language, images do not speak to us primarily on the grounds of conceptual and discursive significations. Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe each emphasize that the meanings of art arise indirectly and are located as if they were between words, rather than that art would be reducible to language. In their writings, the metaphors of "blindness" and "muteness" of art appear recurrently. Their meaning is similar to what Maurice Merleau-Ponty refers to by the idea of the "mute arts."[1] For Merleau-Ponty, art does

not open up the world as a unified whole that would already possess some meaning. Instead, art can only present forms and figures that, in the moment of giving them an expression, do not have a definite signification in language. Only the artist, he says, can give the objects a form, and this form is always singular: it is the form given by the artist, and this is why art as such has significance in the world.

According to Derrida, between language and nonlanguage takes place the singular event of art that is unreachable by the discourses of language.[2] Therefore, such an event cannot be translated into any other form or any other language of expression, but instead, art is always its own subject and its own end, as Lacoue-Labarthe puts it.[3] It is possible to discern here a remarkable difference between phenomenological and post-structural interests in art. In phenomenological thinkers, the focus is on the structure of perception; for example, in "Cézanne's Doubt," Merleau-Ponty argues that art is able to make visible the human perception and the artist's experience of the process of perceiving. For deconstructionists, the role of perception is less important, the focus being more oriented toward the thinking of differences, such as the difference between the conceptual and the sensuous.

Likewise, for Derrida images and the linguistic meaning cannot be reduced to each other: what images communicate to us by showing things cannot be expressed in words without residue. Despite this, it is in his thinking of art that the vocabulary derived from the theory of language and signs assumes a more central position than in the philosophy of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy. The concepts referring to language and the deconstruction of texts raise questions about the supposed muteness and blindness in the relation between language and art. In what follows, I inquire how images become objects of deconstruction. Does art posit the limit of philosophy or language, and why is it important for philosophers to speak about works of art?

When writing of works of art, the words of language and concrete works with material features and aesthetic qualities encounter each other. Yet, according to Nancy, Derrida, and Lacoue-Labarthe, aesthetics and art are not conceptually conceivable, which means that making general, theoretical statements about art proves impossible. In the experience of art, there always remains something that cannot be presented, a material, unnameable remainder; therefore, there is a constant contradiction between art and writing. Based on this discrepancy, I suggest that recognizing this tension between the arguments on the ontology of art and the existence of the individual works of art has influenced on the philosophers' desire to write about works of art. As is well known, the deconstructionist strategies have been developed for the needs of interpreting linguistic meanings and written texts. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how these strategies are reflected in essays on art where the relation between images and words, or works of art and thinking,

emerges when reflecting on any variety of conceptualizing art: philosophy, art historical, and art theoretical writing and the criticism of art.

In their accounts of art, Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe act as both philosophers and critics of art if one considers that their criticism is grounded in particular works of art, reflected on at a certain time and in a certain place, and in their subjective perceptions and experiences. Criticism differs from philosophy and theories precisely because critics tend to evaluate art based on the unique, concrete material existence of works. Philosophy, in turn, often relies on concepts and abstractions of art.[4] Art criticism rather *applies* aesthetic theories to the phenomena of art and explains and evaluates these phenomena than tends to create any solid theory of art. Although Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe describe diverse works of art and speak of their meanings and, at times, of the techniques utilized in them, they nevertheless rarely call their texts "interpretations" of the works. This is true at least insofar as "interpretation" implies a conception of what the author may have referred to with the work or that he or she may have wanted to mean intentionally.[5] From this point of view, an interpretation aims at understanding the subject and the message of the work and relies on the inquiry about the content and form of the work. The analyses I bring to the fore provide, however, discussions about the philosophical content of the works, which, of course, does not only include pictorial analyses, but also, and more emphatically, focuses on the ontology of art.

As it seems, the point of view of the artist as the author of his or her work is often absent from the poststructuralist notion of the work of art, although not entirely. The role of the artist is visible in cases in which the philosopher has a personal relation to the artist, like in Derrida's writings on François Martin's work or Nancy's texts about Simon Hantaï. Generally, the focus of the poststructuralist writers has, nevertheless, shifted from the author's influence to what is called the "death of the author."[6] According to this view, introduced by Roland Barthes, to assign a text a single author and his or her individual experience means delimiting the explanations and interpretations of a text decisively. Instead, the reader must separate the text from its author and to treat the text as a piece of writing that contains a multiplicity of different layers, voices, and quotations. The author thus loses his or her position as the unique sovereignty over his own words and of origin of the text. In the place of the author's intentions comes the text as such, which is the point of departure for all reading; what Barthes points out is that the author does not precede or exceed his writing, and the singularity of the author's intent is never the single source of meaning. The reader now becomes the conceptual space that contains all the text's possible meanings, and the text becomes a dynamic system of layers of signs. This essay by Barthes resonates with Derrida's thinking. For Derrida, not only is the writing an instance of text that

can be read without its author, but also the author and the reader become text. Rather than subjects of reading and writing, they are functions of different experiences, circumstances, and contexts.

When speaking of "art," Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe most often offer insights of paintings, drawings, graphic prints, and sculpture, and less frequently write of forms of contemporary art, such as installations, in which the traditional boundaries of art forms become questioned and even lose their earlier signification. The division of the arts is grounded in the formal qualities and materials of artworks, which appears to be the basis for differentiation also to the deconstructionist philosophers. Contrary to the growing tendencies of renouncing earlier medium-specificity of each art and to the present theories of various kinds of expanded arts, Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe rarely question, in any explicit fashion, the conventional limits of each form of visual art.[7] That is why the notion of visual art that appears in their writings should be understood as a philosophical statement concerning neither the modes of expression used in contemporary art nor the "essence" of art. It may be primarily for such reason that they avoid defining the concept of art in any direct way.

The deconstructionist desire to refrain from giving "art" any essential definitions is partly rooted in the modernist thinking of art. Common to modernism and deconstruction is the critical attitude to the assumption on art's mimetic nature that has dominated theories of art from Plato until Hegel. Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe each have brought out in different ways the idea that the truth of art should not be sought from transcendental concepts or ideas, such as the "work of art," "aesthetics," or "beauty." Rather, art manifests itself to us here and now: the works appear to the viewer so that all that is meaningful in them is present to us in the sensuous figure of the work. Thus, each work of art is undeniable in the sense that it presents a view to its own world. As particularly Nancy has pointed out, this world is not one or shared, but there exist countless worlds of art—the question is about the unique world of the artwork.[8] It reveals something of our reality, but always only in part and as a finite fragment. The world of each work of art is singular and inimitable: artists continuously produce new worlds in their works, and every encounter with a work of art is of a new kind. From this fact it follows that the purpose of works of art is not necessarily even to reflect on the concept of art—what we recognize as "art" is too many-faceted to be subsumed under any immutable concept. For philosophers of deconstruction, the key to works of art is provided by the notion of *presentation*: art reveals its own presentation and its own truth that appears in the artistic presentation as it appears to us, on the sensuous surface of the work of art. As the title of Derrida's study *The Truth in Painting* suggests, the question of truth is, however, meaningful in itself, *as* a question: what is at work at work?

In Derrida's, Nancy's, and Lacoue-Labarthe's analyses of art, the relation between language and images lies between the limit of the visible and invisible. To locate this limit is a difficult and even impossible task—it lies between the perceptible presentations and the concepts inscribed in the works of art. Philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman has given this limit zone two interrelated names, *visualité* and *le visuel*.[9] Although these words usually refer to the realm of visibility, *visualité* and *le visuel* are not, according to Didi-Huberman, anything that the eye can see. Rather, they signify the conditions of seeing and all sensibility that, as such, are not perceptible by the senses. There exists, however, no exact border between the visible and the invisible, or the image and the language, but their distinction can be defined only as an intermediate space or a threshold with nothing unambiguously present or absent. In this situation, the opposition between presence and absence disappears: in the state of the "visual," the gaze and the words are united, but their connection remains indeterminable. In this regard, the concepts of *visualité* and *visuel* resemble, in particular, many concepts that are connected to Derrida's philosophy of language and art: trace, blindness, and *différance*.[10]

ART AND TEXTUALITY: THE TRACES OF WRITING AND *DIFFÉRANCE* IN DERRIDA

The first substantial philosophical writings that Jacques Derrida has written on the visual arts date back to the 1970s, when he published *The Truth in Painting* in 1978. Since then, Derrida has shown interest in the diversity of art: he has written on paintings, drawings, photographs, and video art, as well as architecture and electronic media. In his essays, one may distinguish several wide themes of the twentieth-century philosophy of art: the relation between senses and thinking, the power of the visible in the tradition of metaphysics, and perhaps most importantly, the question of art and language. Derrida's thinking on art also opens questions about whether art is always produced and received linguistically, or if it is possible for an artist to break away from the force of language and discourse.[11]

Perhaps for the reason that the theoretical points of departure of deconstruction are precisely in the analysis of language and literature, Derrida has been asked in interviews about his relation to the visual arts and his motivation for writing about it. He has answered this question most directly in an extensive interview made in 1990.[12] In it, art receives an important role: according to Derrida, strategies for deconstruction even work best when the things to be deconstructed are non-textual, that is, if they are not part of linguistic discourses. He does not give, though, an exact account on how

deconstruction works in a nonlinguistic area, but he nevertheless points out that the differences, references, and traces inherent to the visual arts produce a textual structure to the nonlinguistic or "silent" works of art.[13] This statement raises the question of the nature of textuality in works of art.

If, as Derrida says, the meanings of works of art are not linguistic in nature and yet possess the structure of the text, this is probably because the relation between deconstruction and the visual arts is ambiguous. He has admitted this ambivalence: "It is true that only words interest me," he replied when being asked about the importance of language and the speechless forms of expression, respectively.[14] It is obvious that Derrida gives priority to words instead of images. However, the relationship between images and words turns out to be complicated, as images and language cannot be reduced to one another: when the nonverbal appears in the verbal, the words no longer belong to discourse: "words can be used to explode discourse" precisely because they act nondiscursively in the same way as images.[15] Besides images, the nondiscursivity of language shows itself, for example, in proper names, homonyms, and signatures: in them, words appear in the form of letters and distinguish themselves from the discourse. The nonlinguistic material in language will emerge in this kind of disruptions, in situations where the rules of language are broken with. Words are material in nature; as Derrida explains, they are like corpora. This means that words exist as concrete things in the world; they are not only pure *logos*, meaning or thinking. As if writing a poem, Derrida writes: "I call this the *chef-d'œuvre* ['masterpiece,' but literally 'chief of (the) work' or 'head of (the) work'], the effect of chiefing [*chefferie*] as remainder of a putting-to-work, in other words a putting-into-series, without model, without precedent."[16] Or: "I hear myself say, as someone saying to me, from afar, all I write. I imitate it myself, I limit myself [*Je l'imite moi-même*], I edit myself, I apostrophize all the high and mighty tones. I deafen them."[17] Such materiality of language that is not limited to the literal meaning of the words brings visible the notion that language relates to the concrete materiality: forms, colors, and other properties on the surface of the painting. As such, these qualities are of no significance and cannot be reduced to linguistic expressions without remainder.

Between thinking and art, one thus finds an irreconcilable tension. As Derrida says, the philosophy of art is not able to control the history of art, and the mere philosophical speech on art can only end up in a circle.[18] In his view, Martin Heidegger's essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* tells us of the idea that art is subordinated to language and poetry: this is because "*All art*, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, *essentially poetry*," Heidegger writes.[19] Later, in the early 1990s, Derrida examines the relationship between art and philosophy from another point of view, as he argues that art allows the opportunity of liberation from the "hegemony

and authority" of the philosophical discourse.[20] This thought has motivated the central question here: how is it possible to write philosophically about art and yet, at the same time, maintain the radical difference between art and philosophy—to study art philosophically without making it an instance of philosophy?

Because of Derrida's interest in language and literature, the keys to understanding his notion of fine art have often to be searched in the interpretation of his thinking of text, language, and writing. They include approaches that are specific of deconstruction, the analysis of the expressions of language, puns, which Derrida develops also in writing about the verbal expressions produced by art. Even if language and images are irreducible to each other, philosophy and art are joined by their common relation to truth: truth must be done, not merely exposed and brought to light.[21] In art and language alike, truths cannot be promised. Instead of being truthful representations, both language and artwork are performatives for Derrida—truths of their own being like the proper name and the signature.[22]

Derrida's writings on works of art are roughly divisible into two groups: first, those dealing with art forms based on the concept of space, that is, drawings and paintings, and those focusing on time and duration, namely photography, film, and video art. The division is grounded in the traces that the artist has left on the works. These are observable either in space, in other words, on the surface of the work, or based on time and memory. According to Derrida, "spatial arts" and "arts of space" (*les arts de l'espace*) would be more fitting expressions to describe drawings and paintings than "visuality" and "the visual arts." The title of "spatial arts" corresponds to the nature of the visual arts precisely because the space of art is not limited to mere sight and visibility.[23] Namely, in the work of art, space is not necessarily restricted to the visible space only, but the invisible—thinking and interpretation—has also the space of its own.[24] To exist, works of art and the production of art require both these spheres, the visible and the invisible alike: thinking arises when an artist interprets his or her own memory, and the experience of the work of art arouses thinking in the spectator. Not everything that is part of images and that images generate in the viewer's mind does therefore result from the visible world.

Signs and traces are the visible elements of the artwork. Each stroke of the artist stands out on the surface of the work, and it separates between things and creates space in the work. The sign and the trace are also among the most important concepts in Derrida's interpretation of textuality. They are associated with many of his parallel terms: writing (*écriture*), *graphein*, inscription, repetition, and seriality. Therefore, one may inquire the nature of the relationship between image and language: why are the same concepts used in

the research of both image and language? Derrida's answer is that the word "text" has to be understood in a broader sense than in the meaning of "discourse": namely, as he claims, also the visual arts are revealed to be textual as soon as deconstructive strategies are applied to them. Text, writing, and artwork are bound together by his notion that all the traces, traits, and signs in them are always traces of something that no longer is present and that is yet iterable.[25] In fact, *all* forms of the spatial arts prove to be textual for the reason that spacing takes place in them—in other words, the production of meaning.[26]

In *Memoirs of the Blind*, Derrida states that the *trait* denotes, in its most tangible sense, the outcome of a draughtsman's work: the line of a drawing. This word has an array of meanings: a trait or a feature, a line, stroke, or mark, or tracing, outline, and trace.[27] The focus on the *trait* no doubt provokes a number of questions concerning the significance of the visual in Derrida: given that the structure of the written sign and the drawn line appear in many ways reminiscent of one another, can we put drawing on a par with Derrida's "writing," or state that drawing would be a category of writing? These themes undoubtedly evoke a wider issue concerning the sense of the visual in Derrida's thought—it could even be inquired if the image finally remains a variant of the linguistic field or within a sphere conditioned by the questioning of the literary production of meaning.

Within the field of the linguistic, "writing" is an element with which especially Derrida's early work is concerned. In *Of Grammatology*, he puts forward that all possibility of meaning emerges on the ground of written word. This is contrary to the emphasis on speech as the ultimate ground of meaning, as was highlighted by Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. For Derrida, the concept of writing comprehends and exceeds that of language, as writing refers to "the totality that makes the physical gestures of literal pictographic or ideographic inscription possible."[28] Writing is bound to remain beyond all significations, for it comprises all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not. Besides linguistic signs, among the things that writing distributes in space and time are areas as diverse as cinematography, choreography, and varieties of pictorial, musical, and sculptural "writing."

More than anything, "writing" is an operative term. Writing is the very structure in which *différance* takes place, *différance* being the condition of speech and language.[29] The movement of *différance* consists of the spatial act of differing and the temporal act of deferring, postponing until a later time. This double movement is destined to challenge the metaphysical categories of being—presence and absence—by showing their instability: according to Derrida, there is never either full presence or total absence. The act of *différance* is what constitutes the play of presence and absence by making "possible the

presentation of the being-present," while *différance* never presents itself as such.[30] *Différance* primarily means differentiation, since it is the process of production of differences in space and time, in which their distinction has not yet come about.[31] It is the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual system and process in general.[32] As Derrida points out, it would be violent to name *différance* with a proper name. Yet there is the "difference-itself," which he calls by several names: the interval, distance, spacing, repetition, and trace.[33]

According to Derrida's argument, writing and the visual arts share the structure of *différance* in that they are composed of differential *traits*. Both language and art make the unsaid and the invisible emerge. However, as will be discussed in later parts of this study, there is a fundamental difference between language and fine art: the materiality of art differentiates it from language and makes art, especially painting, nonlinear in character—therefore, even in a stronger sense than language, art is not a part of any system of pure differences. Painting and colors, which necessarily belong to the painted surface, are obviously particularly difficult to be inscribed in the system of differences: with its thickness and tones, painting escapes oppositions even more than drawing and photography.[34]

Différance brings along the production of break, rupture, and noncoincidence between the elements of language or any system. Therefore, *différance* also contains a sense of discord: Derrida understands *différance* as the "original *polemos*," in which an original conflict is at work.[35] The differentiating act of *différance* carries within it not only the connotation of the *different* (*différent*), but also the *differend* (*différend*): polemical otherness and an event in which the discordant parties are not returned to the sphere of the same. *Différance* is concerned with the undecidable: the difference itself remains undecided.[36] As a result, *différance* is polysemic, "with a certain perseverance in repetition," brought about by the contexts in which the sign appears.[37] For Derrida the primary example of polysemy is the metaphor. The metaphor is an example of the ambiguity of the sign or text, the truth of which is always deferred.[38] For Derrida, the metaphor stands for the plurivocal modes of thought and expression.[39] According to him, the metaphor articulates the displacement of the ideal, final meaning with a unified form. With the metaphor, he deconstructs the logic of either/or with *différance* and gives priority to ambiguity, in "both/and" and "neither/nor." He thus wants to show that there is an originary breach in the written between what is intended to be conveyed and what is actually conveyed—this breach comes to play in the conflictual movement of *différance*. Meaning must be constituted of and by difference rather than identity, for *différance* subverts all preconceived theoretical or ontological structures.

For Derrida, everything is contextual, while the contexts are unrestricted and multiplied. One may inquire whether contextuality is *similar* in the

cases of art and language, respectively, and how they relate. In language, the context is formed by other linguistic elements—signs, words, and sentences, their compositions and larger units where language is employed—as well as nonlinguistic referents and other things outside of language. In the visual arts, the context is, no doubt, visual if we consider the formal elements inside or between a work of art. Yet, at the same time, Derrida repeatedly brings out that the context is also nonvisual: thinking and language. According to his argument, art and language have the common structure of writing, which makes the specific nature of the context perhaps not decisive to him.[40]

In language, the meaning of what is said is never present as such in the linguistic sign. Our grasp of any text is only partial and the ways in which we may conceive the text are as endless as they may be conflicting. This is due to Derrida's central idea that there is no present text in general, not even a past present text: the text is not conceivable in an originary or modified form of presence.[41] Instead, the text is composed of pure traces, that is, differences. The traces consist of mental "archives" or "repositories of meaning," which always already exist in the form of transcriptions. Especially interesting in considering the connection between visual arts and writing is that Derrida explicitly calls these traces by the name "originary prints" (*estampes originaires*), a term which appears, for example, in the essay "Freud and the Scene of Writing."[42] Here the notion of trace is connected manifestly with the graphic act of engraving—of hollowing out, which will make something become present only after deferral. Likewise, in the case of drawing, the conflict brought about by the *polemos* of *différance* can point to the fact that the meaning of the image is never simply present. The work of art may show us something, not on condition of what is represented, but rather due to what remains between the depicted *traits* or graphic forms in general. By saying so, Derrida refers to the impossibility of total representation.

In Derrida's analysis, every concept is inscribed within a system in which it refers to other nonidentical concepts. Therefore, every concept or truth is also nonidentical with itself. This is because the "rationality" which traditionally governs a writing no longer issues from a logos.[43] From this it follows that each concept or written sign is related to something other than itself: thereby it keeps "within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element."[44] As there never exists the possibility that a sign—the unity of a signifier and a signified—be produced within an absolute presence, there is neither a meaning unless its origin is in difference.

Further, Derrida's notion of writing is essentially dependent on "arche-writing" (*archi-écriture*), for arche-writing designates the movement of the trace in general. Arche-writing denotes a protowriting without a present origin, not a literal inscription. Arche-writing consists of a process of infinite

referral, of never arriving at meaning itself. Thus, arche-writing points to the presence of the trace and the trace of the present. This means that the presence of self-presence is not indivisible.[45] The subsequent division of presence means the original effraction in time and space by which the content of a sign is linked to an expression.[46] Nevertheless, at the same time, arche-writing tells us that there is no truly objective, non-textual reference to external reality from which interpretation could begin: according to Derrida's famous thesis, "*there is nothing outside the text*": *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*.[47] Arche-writing constitutes the movement in which presence is constantly displaced into a system of differences.[48] At stake is, however, not the dissimilarity between differing and non-differing—that is, a thing's similarity or dissimilarity to another thing—for *différance* from every other existing thing is their condition and shared structure. In Derrida, the play of traces is the play of differences. For this reason, these come before writing and language, and therefore the nominations "arche-trace" and "arche-writing" largely coincide. As it seems, the relation between the *trait* and the act of drawing is comparable to the relation of arche-writing to writing: both give the condition of inscription.

From Truth to Spacing: Art and Difference

The notion of the *trait* is essentially grounded in the structure of what is called "text" by Derrida. By "text," he means various open-ended entities that consist of differences and traces. Therefore, one may ask whether all art is finally a form of text for Derrida. For him, texts are tissues and textures that are composed of linguistic and other signs. These do not directly refer to the extrinsic world; they refer to other texts produced by the culture in which they emerge and form endless chains of meaning. These, in turn, exist only in the form of trace, thus being simultaneously present and absent. For this reason, texts have no real origin, because it is impossible to point out the indisputable source of meanings and truths. All that exists is the differing movement between signs and traces. However, the text also has another, broader meaning for Derrida, that is, contextuality: it means that each text always marks a context for other texts and is dependent upon them.[49] In a more radical sense of contextuality, there is even nothing outside context.[50]

Text and textuality suggest that linguistic or other kinds of signs bear reference not to external world but to other texts. Derrida calls this principle "intertextuality." This is to say that words do not refer to or represent the world but belong to an endless chain of signification, which is at the same present and absent to us.[51] Therefore, language cannot secure a foundation for meaning and truth. Derrida's criticism is directed at "logocentrism," the supposition that the signifier in language is originally and essentially a trace of existing reality.[52]

Derrida's discussion of meaning and truth is grounded in the basic tenets of Plato's doctrine of ideas and its legacy, which has established the influential understanding of art's vocation as mimetically giving shape to ideal truths. The doubt against ideal truth reached its highest point in structuralist linguistics. The core of its criticism lies in the denial of the notion of "full presence" of the sign or of any referent. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida also uses the expression "full speech," thus referring to the ideal of phonocentrism, the traditional thought of the primacy of speech over writing. However, writing does not occur "as such," inscribed "as such" in the words or other signs, but only because of the emerging differences. The sense is born only "between the blinds," on the ground of what does not present itself. Apart from being the condition of writing, the non-presence of the referent is the general condition of all kinds of signification. What results is that presence is no longer determined as presence in the metaphysical sense but as *différance*.

The event of spacing, *espacement*, is closely connected to *différance* in that it is force that differentiates the signs of language and, in fact, any other things and their meanings from each other. For example, the *traits* of a drawing are not themselves in space; rather, they are the conditions of space and they mark invisible boundaries between things that make space possible. Thus, the *traits* create a place while, at the same, they take their own place on the surface of the drawing. The *trait* traces space relentlessly, as it always lies in an interval between the inner and outer edges of the contours that appear in the drawing.[53] The outline separates and separates itself, retraces borderlines and intervals without gathering into any present. Derrida is thus after a notion of drawing that is in a state of becoming; instead of presenting a "thing," he states that the drawing is finally inaccessible, as it points to nothing but the relentless division of what he calls the surroundings (*l'entour*) of the *trait*.[54] Empty space between the traces is required so anything may appear in the drawing—yet emptiness is not a permanent state, but rather the event of the birth of the meaning that cannot be reduced to any conceptual system.[55]

It seems that text and its parallel concepts guide Derrida's way of thinking about the meanings of art. By arguing that the text and the context belong essentially to the thinking of both language and images, Derrida wants to show that the full presence of a thing to itself—be it a linguistic meaning or the object described by language—is impossible. Derrida's criticism of presence includes the idea of blindness, which is part of his theory of drawing and indeed of all art. What we see in a drawing is, in fact, something invisible. Derrida elaborates this seemingly paradoxical argument, especially in *Memoirs of the Blind*. Although the *traits* give rise to space and engender differences in the drawings, these cannot be either conceptualized or controlled by the artist. This is because, for Derrida, the work is created between the *traits* and signs.[56] Since the *trait* cannot be seen as such, drawings are not

visual in the conventional sense. Instead, they are placed on the limit of the visible and the invisible, the line being blind in that it does not yield itself to perception. In contrast, the blind limit is rather the unmaterial condition for the appearance of the image. In that sense, it corresponds to Georges Didi-Huberman's idea of "visuality," which is something indiscernible and cannot be distinguished as the limit of the visible and invisible. According to Derrida, drawing, painting, and other varieties of the visual could be called even the art of the blind: the drawing hand is the hand of the blind. Blindness is a part of making art: the artist does not rely only on the gaze, nor can the space of the works of art be controlled by merely visual means, but space also includes layers of thought and memory that exceed the limits of eyesight.

In addition to drawings, paintings belong to the arts of the space portrayed by Derrida, for the surface of painting also consists of traces. However, unlike drawings, the painting is not based on the use of the *trait*, similar to the signs of language. Rather, paintings are composed of color.[57] Although the traces are what associates the drawing and the painting to writing, Derrida rejects, however, the idea according to which language and painting would be equivalent. This is for the reason that words always linger on the limit between language and its outside, and words can never actually reach the painting. Instead, painting is writing as such: it is beyond all words. Hence, painting is singular and inimitable by nature: as Derrida defines it, painting is a source of thinking according to the experience that it emerges in the spectator. Therefore, painting is no longer concerned with *logos*. The visible cannot be explained in words because painting and especially the colors are untranslatable (*intraduisible*) in the same way as the signature and the idioms of language.[58]

However, it is obvious that Derrida's relation to images is not without tensions. The analysis of images seems to require concepts associated with the interpretation of language and signs, namely the consideration of differences, disruptions, intertextual references, repetition, citation, and memory. There is always a contradiction between paintings and language attached to them, as the affects produced by the works always exceed linguistic expressions.[59] Therefore, for Derrida, the conceptualization of paintings finally turns out to be impossible, as mere description and cataloguing of the content of the works is never enough to discussing the painting philosophically. Especially speaking about colors creates problems: colors are always singular and cannot be described sufficiently with common names such as "blue" or "yellow." For this reason, it is difficult to name the color: how to do this without using figurative language, how to name a color literally? It is the lines and the colors that produce the differences and attributes that are difficult to characterize in the paintings. From this, it follows that when conceptualizing them, "things become complicated, thicken, darken

and sometimes even blacken."[60] The visible surface of paintings, the texture of the paint, its thickness and gloss, the mixing and effect of shades of color and the use of light expose Derrida to questions that are particularly complicated to be solved by applying to them concepts such as "language" and "writing," whereas these concepts are an integral part of his analysis of drawing.[61]

According to Derrida, words and meanings always correspond to each other incompletely. The aim of his theories is to break away from the structures that have been seen to condition the production of meanings. For Derrida, however, no text can contain stable meanings, nor can such meanings be sought. In the context of images, this means that also language may turn into nondiscursive: when speaking about language and images alike, the most important thing is what in the words remains without words and unreached by any discourse.[62] Even though images are, in Derrida's opinion, "mute" and "silent," that is, outside the linguistic discourse, lists of words, verbal associations, and concepts connected to the analysis writing unite art to language and maintain their undecidable tension.

NANCY AND THE FRAGMENTS OF ART

Jean-Luc Nancy has written extensively on the visual arts: he has published numerous works on art and written dozens of essays on art with various styles and purposes. Nancy's perspective is not bound to language exactly as it is in Derrida, but they share, nonetheless, the interest in the concepts of difference, presentation, and presence. To make sense of Derrida's and Nancy's theory of the work of art, it is appropriate to raise their discussion on particular works of art at this point, since the reviews of works serve as an example of how the relationship between theory and its objects, namely images, is formed.

Nancy's goal is to deconstruct what is traditionally seen to be part of the relation between art and philosophy: the ontology of art, its history, and the gap between the general concept of "art" and the existence of individual, concrete works. Nancy's philosophy of art is characterized by a complex notion of difference. This notion manifests itself throughout his ontology of art, assumptions about the concept of the work, the various arts, the truth, and the presentation of art. When writing about artists and their works, Nancy often emphasizes the features and qualities of the works—their debt to art history, the expression and style of the artist, visual influences, associations brought about by the works, and also their narrative content. These features become particularly important in his speaking of historical paintings and other works that have a distinct subject matter and that are inspired by the tradition of art.

Nancy has a keen interest in different types of images, and he has written widely of portraits in specific.

According to Nancy's argument, there is no general and unified concept of being, and therefore there has never been a general and unified concept of art either.[63] By contrast, the origin of art is already scattered from the beginning, since we have, in reality, never had an encompassing Idea of art that would provide a unified form to all the countless phenomena of art. For this reason, the existence of art must be examined beginning from individual, concrete works of art and their details. In this sense, Nancy's notion of art derives from the Romantic thinking of art, which emphasizes the constant transformation and development of the concept of art and the unique ideal expressed by every singular work of art. Accordingly, artists create new kinds of works from heterogeneous elements that may be borrowed from different forms of art.[64]

Like "art," the "work of art" is an open concept in Nancy's philosophy. From this notion, it follows that the meanings of the "work of art" have to be defined again each time, in different eras and in different situations. This is because the content of the concept of art, too, remains undetermined and is redefined by each work that is made. On the one hand, no single fact is sufficient to name a thing as art or a work of art; on the other, there is no element that alone would be common to all the arts.[65] On the contrary, the whole concept of "work" is, in Nancy's view, inconsistent with itself and always only partial, without giving us an unambiguous representation of its supposed content. Each work of art is always more versatile than any individual interpretation that concerns it, as it is always rephrased in the light of different perspectives and in different contexts. The emphasis on the importance of contexts is associated with Nancy's political idea of the "workless" or "unworking" community (*la communauté désœuvrée*).[66] By this, he refers to a community that is not permanently defined by any common factor and in which there is nothing that the members of the community would share or that would be proper to the community. The members can only share the experience of difference—namely, of the fact that there is indeed no common identity to be shared in the community. Such a community is thus not to be conceived in the form of a limited, manageable "work."

According to Nancy, the work of art does not have any stable boundaries and permanent base allowed for by definitions and ideas of art. There is an endless number of works of art in the world, and more works are being produced constantly. At the same time, every work made by an artist is unique and, in principle, will define the concept of art again every time a new work of art comes into being. According to Nancy, the work is never a symbol for another thing, nor is it a true representation of being. For this reason, the work of art does not manifest truth "in the sense philosophy would have liked it,"

Nancy notes.[67] Rather than being a faithful imitation, the whole truth of the artwork lies in how it presents itself to the spectator on the visible surface of the work. The whole sense of the work of art is in its original existence.

While all the works of art are different from one another, they are also internally differentiated. The material details of the works can be structured in countless ways; they touch upon each other and are different from one another. The details of a work of art may be configured in innumerable variations and appear to the spectator in varying contexts. It is therefore impossible to name the general essence that would be common to all works or art.[68] According to Nancy, it is for this reason that art exists only in fragments: particular works are not part of the idea of "Art," but "art" is already included in every work originally. It is devoid of a uniform essence; instead, what we call art is already fragmented, multifaceted, and continually cumulative.[69]

For Nancy, the frame that borders the works of art is thus open: it is impossible to tell consistently where to locate the limit between the work of art and the outside world. The outside is represented, for example, by philosophy and other art-related discourses.[70] The work of art cannot be identified with its own medium, technique, style period, time of completion, or the subject matter that the work seems to represent. Perhaps for the very reason that the work of art is finally not to be defined, Nancy has chosen to analyze a large number of works. This has allowed him to approach what appears in his theory not as a common and unified essence of art but as specific to each of the works of art. That the phenomena of art are not to be understood in any general terms seems to be the only thing that unites them for Nancy. This is what brings art close to his notion of community.

When speaking of the relation between art and language, Nancy's goals are not similar to Derrida's. However, they share many concepts in their analyses of art. Nancy brings forward the idea of art as a notion that has never been one but has been fragmented from the beginning. By means of language, it is difficult and even contradictory to make space for art as fragmentation, art as a practice that only appears in singular instances. How to speak of art, if there is never a common essence to it? Or if it is impossible to put the work of art into words by, for example, making a list of its perceptible features?[71] The problem is how works of art can be spoken in terms of language, because the discourses of the language take on too much power when writing of art. There is a danger that language and writing produce the transcendental conditions of visibility for works of art, in which case language determines what is seen.[72] Despite this, writing that is aimed at explaining and theorizing art has often turned into the "original supplement" of modern works of art, as Nancy formulates by citing Derrida: each text is a context for another text and hence works as an original supplement to it.[73] Therefore, we may inquire whether it is even possible to think of art at a general, philosophical level, unless the

perception of art is based on the existence of real works of art, their presentation, media, the employed materials, and other formal qualities of the works.[74]

In Nancy, there is a breach between art and writing because the linguistic concepts are not able to capture the concept of diversity, heterogeneity, and conceptions of works. The breach can, however, be overcome, since writing about works of art—as, in Nancy's case, of paintings by François Martin—must always begin from the written character or *trait* hidden by the painting, as well as from the traces and contours it leaves on the canvas.[75] The painting thus equals the leaving of traces in the same way as writing: as Nancy claims, paintings themselves write about paintings. This is what makes painting possible in the first place. This is what makes painting a kind of writing, although its reader must no doubt understand "writing" in the same nondiscursive, nonconceptual sense as Derrida does. In Nancy's view, painting's visibility is not only written, but it is also discernible and understandable (*légible*): something written belongs to the imageless core of painting and to the whole domain of the visible. Namely, what belongs to them are traces. Writing appears in, for example, the way in which artistic themes are repeated in different contexts, in more or less varying ways.[76] Art thus resembles language, but as a variety of language and writing, it is nonconceptual—and, therefore, mute.

Even though Nancy does not really strive to make comparisons between works of art, bringing them together on some common grounds—such as their shared subject matter, like in the case of nude pictures or a biblical theme—often generates the idea of series of images. This seems to be the case even if he stresses the unicity of each work and the diversity and heterogeneity taken by the forms of art. They allow us to juxtapose the similarities and differences between presentations—and, for example, to consider what philosophically characterizes the given pictorial types and series, such as portraits. In this sense, the notions of repetition and textuality prove to be important to Nancy.

THE FICTIONED TRUTH OF ART: LACOUE-LABARTHE AND THE MIMETIC TRACES

Compared to Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe has written relatively scarcely of the visual arts. However, the significance of art is remarkable for him, and his thinking often takes aspects of literature, theater, and music as its point of departure. Lacoue-Labarthe has written widely of poetry, especially the poetry of Romanticism and Idealism, Friedrich Hölderlin's *œuvre* in specific, as well as Heidegger's philosophy of poetry. He has published studies on Richard Wagner's compositions and ancient tragedies and also translated and directed plays that are based

especially on Hölderlin's translations of the tragedies of Antiquity, such as Sophocles's *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex*.

In philosophy of art, Lacoue-Labarthe's views are interlaced with the ideas concerning the groundlessness of being and with the thought that being is a mark of originary fiction.[77] Among Lacoue-Labarthe's largest themes is the interrelatedness of aesthetics and politics. Alongside it, he raises in all of his production the question of mimesis. Here, mimesis does not only refer to artistic imitation as it has often been conceived of in aesthetic theories. Rather, mimesis means to Lacoue-Labarthe the origin of all things and the production of the world and its meanings. As with Derrida, in Lacoue-Labarthe mimesis stands for a productive logic: it never emerges as such, and he finds it impossible to define mimesis by means of concepts.[78] Lacoue-Labarthe's idea of mimesis differs thus fundamentally from the notion that predominates in the metaphysical tradition that has begun with Plato. In Plato and his followers, mimesis has above all meant the ability to produce "the same": correspondence and similarity, knowledge and truth about ideas. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, mimesis also means a productive ability, but it is possible to produce mimetically truth as well as illusions. Mimesis is fiction or, in other words, the world's ability to produce itself.[79] His concept of "originary mimesis" (*mimesis originaire*) indeed points to mimesis that operates without any preexisting model. Mimesis is therefore not a logic of imitation, but the power that brings about art and all existence and the principle of producing the sense of being. It is associated with Lacoue-Labarthe's idea of original fiction that appears in his philosophy of art and, more broadly, in his thinking overall. In the case of art, "original fiction" means art's ability to *show* things rather than tell a "truth" about them by means of imitation. By stating so, Lacoue-Labarthe emphasizes the notion that art has the ability to transcend all preexisting meanings.[80] This concept is shared by deconstructionist philosophers and the modernist theorists of art of the twentieth century alike.

The legacy of Romantic and Idealist philosophy offers to Lacoue-Labarthe his most important points of departure for examining art. From modernism he has inherited some of its major themes that he approaches critically—among these concepts are the subject, figure, and presentation, form and matter, and the end of art. He has dealt with artistic presentation especially when contemplating modern painting and photography. In the field of painting, Lacoue-Labarthe's most extensive writings deal with François Martin's paintings, which he first analyzed in the late 1970s.

According to Lacoue-Labarthe, the image and language belong together. What is relevant in a work of art is its ability to touch the viewer, but the work does not touch without the mediation of language. Even though art touches us and is therefore "pathic," its effect is not limited to the level of unspeakable affections. Language necessarily belongs to the aesthetic figure of the work,

too: "First, the painting attracts *logos*, a discourse or writing," he says—in other words, it gives us a sense of what the painting offers to our thinking.[81] Art and concepts form separate realms, but in works of art, they are immediately connected with each other: the work is not conceivable without language being involved in the creation of its meanings.

In this sense, Lacoue-Labarthe's idea of the interlacement of language and images is similar to that of Derrida's and Nancy's, and this connection is particularly striking in drawing. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, drawing is a reflection of the connection between Western art and the notion of logocentrism. Drawing brings together a number of concepts that derive from Derrida's characterization of language and signs: the *trait* and *graphein*, inscription, engraving (*gravure*) and writing, trace and imprint.[82] Lacoue-Labarthe argues that theories of drawing have been regarded more important than color. This duality between drawing and color has its origin in Plato, who established a hierarchy between *logos*—language or reason—and image that was a mere shadow, an image of an image. In the later centuries, drawing was understood as an instance of theoretical reason, whereas color represented the visible universe in the variety of its forms. According to this view, the *traits* of a drawing reflect the original, unmodified form conceived by the artist's mind. Color, in turn, is the source of truthful depiction, but in its materiality it has for centuries represented diversity, multiplicity, the body, and the emotions.[83] In the debate on the primacy of color and drawing (*disegno e colore*), the central question concerns the position of drawing and painting.[84] Drawing reflects the Platonic primacy of the idea in representation, whereas color, being the very material of painting, embodies the anti-Platonic emphasis on materiality and the life-like effects of simulacra produced by color.

In Lacoue-Labarthe's analyses of paintings, drawings, and sculpture language and nonverbal are associated. However, as he points out, the distinction between language and its outside should not necessarily be identified with the dialectics of reason and sense—that is, between sense or the lack of sense (*sens ou non-sens*) and the sensuous (*sensible*).[85] Lacoue-Labarthe's accounts show that the inquiry into art requires the deconstruction of traditional aesthetics—the dismantling of the relationship between the sensuous and the linguistic, a goal that is equally present in Derrida's and Nancy's philosophy.

THE WITHDRAWING PORTRAIT

There is hardly only one single deconstruction of art. Instead, one may discern several ways of deconstructing images and assumptions about them. What is common to the philosophers discussed above is the idea concerning

the ability of presenting things that is unique to art: every artistic presentation is the truth of its own manifestation, namely of the fact *that* the work of art is a presentation of a thing and gives something to be experienced. Images exist in front of us. According to Nancy's statement, they are not, however, only a part of the world that surrounds us within our reach but also offer an inexhaustible source of thought. For the reason that art distinguishes itself in the flow of things and does not only merge into the ordinary and everyday, one has to inquire whether for Derrida and Nancy art has a degree of autonomous value, already emphasized by modernist theories of art. Derrida has argued that art is not disconnected from life since it is always part of the structures that produce meaning in a culture—in his words, art belongs to the scheme of writing. Nevertheless, works of art have the ability to stand out from other things in the world and produce meanings through their own modes and techniques of presentation.

Among artistic traditions, Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe share a particular interest in portraiture. The study of the portrait forms an important part of their theories of art, as it also reflects several features that characterize more generally their arguments about the "work of art." Traditionally, the portrait has been regarded as a paradigm of presentation. In the portrait, the relationship between the character and its representation is ordinarily assumed to be unambiguous: according to a conventional definition, the portrait is to present a model with his or her personal and individual character.[86] The portrait is a variable but also historically established type of images whose most essential feature is resemblance of the portrayed person. One of the main tasks of the portrait has been to preserve the image of a person after death, for until the invention of photography, the capturing of the human features was impossible except by means of art. Therefore, artists immortalized their model for posterity in portraits. In the history of art, portraits have been designed to enhance knowledge of human nature and self-knowledge, as it is possible to see in portrait the character through another person's eye and hand.

In art historical studies, the relationship between the depicted person and the artistic presentation appears often generally unproblematic. However, deconstructionist philosophers have brought into question what they perceive as unproblematized accounts of portraiture. For them, the portrait is a depiction of a human, but it is never able to give a visible figure to the portrayed person's "selfhood" as it is. Instead of assuming that a portrait is a representation of the depicted person, Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe understand the nature of the portrait differently: as they claim, the portrait does not actually represent anything or anyone because its model—the real person—is always absent from the image. For this reason, the depicted "self," or the "I" of the person represented, is necessarily always at another place and

another in comparison to the portrayed figure. When looking at the image, the viewer is faced with its mere surface and sees only a presentation. The mutual, recognizable resemblance between the presentation and the portrayed person is, in the end, only an accidental feature of portraits. The reminiscence does not attest the mimetic idea that the model and the work of art would resemble each other. On the contrary, the image does not represent the human appearance or the person's character as such but makes visible only the image itself, its own surface. The portrait thus embodies the philosophers' wish to deconstruct the aesthetics based upon the thought of reproduction and imitation and, at the same time, to question the position of vision in theories of art. The analyses of portraits are aimed at showing the hidden assumptions in the notion of portrait and, more widely, of image, that are grounded in the unquestioned primacy of vision.

Although portraits are seen often as examples of resemblance and a person's depiction is habitually understood to be their indisputable subject, such a definition of the autonomous portrait does not, in Nancy's view, suffice to characterize the portrait as a type of images.[87] In his view, the subject of the portrait is explicitly the portrait itself. In this sense, the portrait serves even as a general model of art to Nancy: as he defines it, each portrait is an image of an image in general and offers the Idea of painting.[88] This means that the "idea" of art is art itself. Thus, Nancy gives the portrait a radical philosophical meaning: *every* image is fundamentally a portrait, an image of the portrait itself and of its very presentation, as if it were the absolute of image. The portrait works as the paradigm or example of painting, since in portraits and, in particular, in the self-portraits of an artist, the criteria of similarity and resemblance are not valid: portraits are presentations of art and the artist *in general*.[89]

From the point of view of the deconstruction of mimesis, portraits are particularly relevant to Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Derrida insofar as they have the ability to present the idea of absence that belongs to the logic of image and presentation. In portraiture, the deconstructionist philosophers observe the poststructuralist idea that we encounter the world only in the form of images and representations. Jean Baudrillard has described these images as simulacra: the simulacrum is a copy that does not have an original or that no longer has one.[90] Representations appear and reappear in different contexts, but there are no more original or more authentic models for them. Maybe in a better manner than any other genre of images, portraits bring into light the logic of mimesis: in portraits, mimesis even gives a model to itself. For Nancy, mimesis appears between two extremes: the pure presence that abolishes mimesis and the similarity of the image, where mimesis paradoxically underscores the absence and disappearance of the portrayed model.[91] In other words, the mimetic model fails in implying that the image would represent

"the same" as the model. As Lacoue-Labarthe phrases it, the ability to present the unpresentable, that is, the thing that is absent from the image, is thus what mimesis "itself" means.[92]

Derrida's notion of art and visibility is largely comparable to Nancy's and Lacoue-Labarthe's. According to Derrida, in drawing and in fact in any work of art, the spectator sees what is invisible to him: therefore, the portrait may be characterized by "ruins" and "spectrality"; these are also features that characterize Derrida's view of the photograph.[93] According to him, drawing is based on the idea of blindness: in drawing, we never see the drawn thing itself, but only what lies beyond the *traits*.[94] As Derrida argues, the visible elements of the image, the lines and the traces, do not depict anything that would already exist in the world. The portrait is never identifiable with the depicted subject in a straightforward fashion. For this reason, the mimetic relation between the image and its "origin," the model, proves impossible. The notion that the portrait is based on blindness instead of visibility suggests in Derrida's theory that art is beyond vision as well as the model is absent. Rather, what he addresses in art is the realm of thinking. This principle emerges in Derrida even more clearly than in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe.

"Resemblance," in the conventional sense of the word, does not yield sufficient criteria for defining the portrait. How is it possible to make something to be called "portrait," and who is the portrait an image of, if we suppose that the subject of the portrait is, in fact, always absent from it? Derrida's, Nancy's, and Lacoue-Labarthe's shared assumption of the subject's absence from the image also raises the question whether it is possible to relieve oneself of the conventional interpretation of the portrait, the rhetoric of the I or the self belonging to the philosophy of the subject. This question reveals the contradiction that is part of the deconstructionist notion of the portrait. Namely, if the purpose of the portrait is to reveal the model's self, the truth of this "self" is never present in the image. For example, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, in the portrait and especially in the self-portrait, there is actually nothing else that belongs to the presented figure than the image's ability to exceed itself. As a work of art, the image of the person always gives us more to observe than the mere resemblance of the person.[95] It is impossible to present anything that would really belong to the depicted person's self; also in the image, the I is inevitably another, someone else—to quote poet Arthur Rimbaud's words, *Je est un autre*.[96]

Since the portrait illustrates the absence of the origin—that is, of the model—the conceptual structure belonging to the portrait's presentation is comparable to Derrida's idea of text. With each philosopher examined here, the portrait includes a similar idea of the repetition of signs and the process of their endless determination according to their context. This notion derives

from Derrida's theory, and is particularly evident in Nancy's analysis of a portrait painted from a mirror image.[97]

Despite the striking similarities, the theories of Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe are not without differences, however. Nancy extends the concept of the portrait beyond anyone else's for the reason that *all* images appear to him as portraits: they bring out and intensify the inner power of the image. What touches the spectator in the portrait is not the outward look of the model. Rather, he or she is touched by the inside of the image that rises to the surface of the image and is able to show us something. Rather than imitating its subject matter realistically, the portrait is fictive from the beginning and only presentation. Namely, according to Nancy, the portrait portrays the presentation by showing the image as if outside of itself.[98] He thus contradicts the traditional notion of the portrait's resemblance to the subject: as he says, the model and the presented image never correspond with each other because of a simple "similarity."[99] The spectator sees the material surface of the image and can identify the subject only because of the associations awakened by the image. The function of the portrait is to show the inner form and "soul" of the model.[100] Therefore, instead of being a representation or a fixed schema, the image is an "imprint of the intimacy of its passion"—to which belong "its motion, its agitation, its tension, its passivity."[101] At the same time, the inner power of the image retreats from the eye and stays constantly inside the work.

In addressing the portrait, Lacoue-Labarthe inquires in specific the nature of the self-portrait, which he deals with in the extensive essay on photography "Portrait de l'artiste, en général."[102] In *Just Another Story about Leaving* (1974), a series of nine black-and-white self-portraits, Swiss artist Urs Lüthi photographed himself disguised in different ages and in both "masculine" and "feminine" ways. Lacoue-Labarthe questions the idea that Lüthi's photographs could ever represent a real person as him- or herself. He claims that the photographed person exists only in the reality of the photograph and is therefore beyond time as well.[103] What is called "self-portrait" is, in fact, always another's image, *alloportrait*: to be more precise, it is the image of the other without figure. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, the *alloportrait* refers to the same as the mirror stage described by Lacan. For him, this stage is crucial in the formation of the subject. By recognizing him- or herself in a mirror, the child identifies him- or herself with the symbolic order, represented by a specular image, which is illusionary and fragmented.[104] In all, the portrait reveals someone other than the depicted person—the subject of the picture is impersonal; it is always elsewhere and endlessly far away. As a result, the identity of the subject always proves to be conventional in the self-portrait. This assumption is close to Nancy's idea of the nature of portraits: the other shown by the portrait is absent even when it appears to the viewer.[105] The figure of the portrait remains unknown. It does not appear to us as another

but only reveals the enigma of its own absence. According to both Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, the image is located in an unsolvable tension, which corresponds to the position that Derrida allows to images: the blind space between words and visibility.

In Derrida's thinking of images, the idea of the specific nature of differences is indeed of importance. The blind space required by images arises from the movement that is produced by differences between the *traits* of the work of art. Such movement retreats, disappears, reappears, and thus creates the space of the image in an invisible rhythm. For this reason, the *trait* never exists in a general sense: the *trait* or traces of the drawing do not have a presence in general, but like Derrida's notion of text, the drawing consists of pure traces—in other words, of differences.[106] Thus, the image consisting of drawn lines ultimately lacks identity and reference, as the meaning of the image arises in our own minds only. No image as such, as a visible object on paper or canvas, resembles anything or anyone, Derrida claims. Instead, spectators need to use their associations and memory, so that the work of art may resemble or "look like" a thing.

Evidently, Derrida's idea of the image corresponds in many respects to what Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe have proposed, especially as the full presence of the depicted figure is impossible to achieve by means of either image or language. For Derrida, the image means nothing but the difference between the appearance and disappearance of the thing.[107] A similar notion is also manifest in his thinking of language, as the word spoken in language is heard and understood, but nothing in speech makes the word visible. All the aforementioned philosophers share the idea that the meanings in image and language alike emerge based on the absence and withdrawal of the thing: language arises from muteness, images from blindness.[108] In speaking of images, seeing a thing refers to a metaphorical blindness that allows one to see only the ruins of the image. Ruins are the ground of every image. For example, to identify the face of a portrait as a definite person's face paradoxically tells about the impossibility of the presentation: especially in front of self-portraits, we tend to look past the figure whose depiction the image is. Then our eyes will encounter the memory of our own face, and we will see the ghostly trace of the portrait, the ruin of the image.

As brought forward by the philosophers of deconstruction, the notion of the portrait reveals that the relation between language and image is even more complicated in the case of works of art than in other varieties of reality. The deconstructive notion of difference originates from the philosophy of language and textuality. In art, however, the importance of difference becomes even more emphasized than in speaking of other things. Images, while unique and singular, nevertheless provide models for every other image, and they receive their inimitable form in each work of art. The study of portraits shows

that this type of images or art in a broader sense is reducible neither to discursive systems, to anything that we know already, or in "truths," such as the real person, the model of the portrait.

The notion of the image proposed by Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe differs from a number of other modern and recent theories in that the thought of representation becomes questioned radically in the deconstructionist view. According to it, the meaning of the image and its impression of similarity and resemblance do not reside in the image itself, but always in its outside: in the differences produced by *traits* and traces. As a result, the image does not give rise to a figure or anything that might correspond with what we perceive in reality. In this sense, the deconstructionist idea of the image is in contrast with theories of traditional aesthetics that rely, even remotely, on the thinking of mimesis. For deconstructionists, works of art are not mimetic figures and visions of the world, but always only partial images, fragmentary, and incomplete. Deconstruction of the thought of the figure means that the image is unceasingly in a state where the presented figures appear only when they withdraw from sight. In the image, they show themselves only in the relations between the elements and as the nonconceptual sense that they produce. Images do not thus arise from any dialectics between presence and absence or the visible and the invisible. For this reason, one may call both the portrait and art more generally an-aesthetic or nonsensory in character: inexpressible in words, blind and mute. In spite of blindness and muteness, works of art make things visible by showing the fleeting boundary between presentation and its retreat in a way that makes art productive rather than representative in nature.

NOTES

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 58.
2. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 184 ("Sauver les phénomènes: pour Salvatore Puglia").
3. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art* (Genève: Les Presses du réel, 2009), 182–184.
4. James Elkins, "Art Criticism," in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 2, ed. Jane Turner (London: Macmillan, 1996), 517–519.
5. Noël Carroll, *On Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 115.
6. Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 142–148 ("The Death of the Author").
7. One of the most important writings in the discussion concerning the modernist limits of arts and their current expansion is the essay by Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 30–44; for contemporary accounts, see, for example, *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, eds. Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg

Press, 2016), and Mark Titmarsh, *Expanded Painting: Ontological Aesthetics and the Essence of Colour* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

8. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), 12–13 (*Au fond des images*, Paris: Galilée, 2003, 29–30).

9. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Minuit, 1992), 156.

10. For *différance*, see Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 3–27, esp. 17 (*Marges de la philosophie* 3–29, esp. 16–17).

11. Ginette Michaud, Joana Masó and Javier Bassas, "Présentation des éditeurs," in Jacques Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 7–10.

12. Peter Brunette and David Wills, "The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, eds. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 9–32; Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 15–55 ("Les arts de l'espace: Entretien avec Peter Brunette et David Wills").

13. Brunette and Wills, "The Spatial Arts," 15–16; Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 25–26.

14. Brunette and Wills, "The Spatial Arts," 19; Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 33. See also Derrida, "Right of Inspection," trans. David Wills, *Art & Text* 32 (Autumn 1989): 25 ("Une lecture de *Droit de regards*," in Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards*, Bruxelles: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2010, iv).

15. Brunette and Wills, "The Spatial Arts," 20; Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 34.

16. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 223 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 255: "Je nomme cela le *chef-d'œuvre*, l'effet de la chefferie comme reste d'une mise en œuvre, autrement dit en série, sans modèle, sans précédent.")

17. Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey and Richard Rand (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 229 (*Glas*, Paris: Galilée, 1974, 255: "Je m'entends dire, de loin, tout ce que j'écris. Je l'imite moi-même, je m'édite moi-même, j'apostrophe tous les verbes hauts. Je les assourdis.")

18. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 20ff. (*La Vérité en peinture*, 25ff.).

19. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971; "The Origin of the Work of Art"), 72; see also Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 22–23 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 27–28).

20. Brunette and Wills, "The Spatial Arts," 10 (Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 17).

21. See Jacques Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, trans. Jeff Fort, ed. Gerhard Richter (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010), 5.

22. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 10 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 14).

23. Brunette and Wills, "The Spatial Arts," 24–25 (Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 40–42, 139); see also Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) (*Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1991).

24. One may refer here only very briefly to Derrida's deconstruction of the notion of space as a homogeneous, geometrically determinable expanse. For him, space is characterized by the concept of the *khôra* that originates from Plato's philosophy. For Plato, the *khôra* means an interval and a space between things, as well as their material substratum. In Derrida, the *khôra* implies a differing movement, *différance*, that is temporalization at once as it is spatiality. See Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 3–27 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 1–29); Plato, *Timaeus*, 48e4, 52a. On Derrida's writings on architecture, see Jacques Derrida, *Les arts de l'espace: Écrits et interventions sur l'architecture*, eds. Ginette Michaud and Joana Masó (Paris: La Différence, 2015).

25. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 40–50 (*De la grammatologie*, 60–73).

26. See Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 7–9 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 8–9).

27. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 2–3 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 10–11). The *trait* will be examined in more detail in forthcoming chapters.

28. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 9 (*De la grammatologie*, 19).

29. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 4 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 4).

30. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 6 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 6).

31. Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005), 150.

32. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 8–9 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 9).

33. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 93 (*De la grammatologie*, 142).

34. The position of painting and the other arts will be discussed in length in chapter 3, especially in section "The Deconstruction of Painting."

35. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 8 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 8).

36. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), for example, § 60.

37. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 8 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 8).

38. See, for example, Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 270–280 (*De la grammatologie*, 381–382); Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. 1, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007), 48–80 ("The *Retrait* of Metaphor," trans. Peggy Kamuf).

39. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 207–272 ("White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy") (*Marges de la philosophie*, 247–324).

40. This question will be developed further in the forthcoming chapters of this study.

41. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 211 (*L'écriture et la différence*, Paris: Seuil, 1967, 316).

42. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 212 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 316).

43. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 9 (*De la grammatologie*, 19).

44. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 13 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 13).

45. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973), 59, 65 (*La Voix et le phénomène*, Paris: PUF, 1967, 66, 73); Gayatri C. Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in *Of Grammatology*, lxix.

46. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 60 (*De la grammatologie*, 88–89).

47. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158 (*De la grammatologie*, 227). Italics in the original.

48. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 16 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 16–17).

49. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 70–73 (*De la grammatologie*, 102–108).

50. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988), 136 (*Limited Inc.*, Paris: Galilée, 1990, 252).

51. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 71 (*De la grammatologie*, 104–105).

52. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 27–73, esp. 73 (*De la grammatologie*, 42–108).

53. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 12 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 16–17); *Memoirs of the Blind*, 53–54 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 58). The notion of the *trait* will be discussed at length in chapter 4.

54. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 54 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 58).

55. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 77 ("Penser à ne pas voir").

56. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 55 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 59); *Penser à ne pas voir*, 59 ("Penser à ne pas voir").

57. Esp. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 179–192 ("Sauver les phénomènes: Pour Salvatore Puglia").

58. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 181–182, 241.

59. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 232–237 ("De la couleur à la lettre").

60. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 223 ("De la couleur à la lettre").

61. The differences between Derrida's theories of painting and drawing will be discussed in chapter 3.

62. Brunette and Wills, "The Spatial Arts," 20 (Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 34, "Les arts de l'espace").

63. Nancy, *The Muses*, 22–25 (*Les Muses*, 44–48).

64. See Friedrich Schlegel, *Literary Notebooks 1797–1801*, ed. H. Eichner (London: Athlone, 1957), § 1733.

65. Nancy, *The Muses*, 1–39 (*Les Muses*, 11–70).

66. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Fenves (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991; *La communauté désœuvrée*, Paris: Bourgois, 1986); *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000; *Être singulier pluriel*, Paris: Galilée, 1996).

67. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 137–138 (*Le sens du monde*, Paris: Galilée, 1993, 210–211).

68. Nancy, *The Muses*, 19–20 (*Les Muses*, 38–40).

69. Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, 123 (*Le sens du monde*, 189).

70. Cf. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*.

71. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, trans. Simon Sparks et al., ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006), 158.

72. Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 149–151.

73. Cf. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 141–164 (*De la grammatologie*, 203–234) ("…That Dangerous Supplement . . . ").

74. See Nancy, *The Muses*, esp. 15–16 (*Les Muses*, 34–36); Gerhard Richter, "Between Translation and Invention: The Photograph in Deconstruction," in Jacques Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, ed. Gerhard Richter (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010), xxiii–xxiv; Martta Heikkilä, *At the Limits of Presentation: Coming-into-Presence and its Aesthetic Relevance in Jean-Luc Nancy's Philosophy* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), 155–162.

75. Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 151.

76. Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 152.

77. See Simon Sparks, "Editor's Introduction: Politica ficta," in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, ed. Simon Sparks (London: Routledge, 1997), xxiii.

78. The notion of mimesis will be discussed in chapter 6.

79. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Typographie," in Sylviane Agacinski et al., *Mimesis: des articulations* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 180, 193–196; *L'imitation des modernes* (Paris: Galilée, 1985).

80. See Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," trans. Richard Klein, *Diacritics* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 3–25 ("Économimesis," in Sylviane Agacinski et al., *Mimesis: des articulations*, Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1975, 55–93).

81. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art*, 161–162.

82. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art*, 207–208.

83. Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 2–3.

84. The *disegno e colore* was a debate that developed in Renaissance Italy over the importance of design or drawing (*disegno*) and color (*colore*) in painting. In the *disegno e colore* controversy, two elements of painting were opposed: the line that was thought to embody the idea or invention in the artist's mind, and color that represented creativity and made the painting more life-like and natural. For example, Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere (New York: The Modern Library, 2006).

85. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art*, 224.

86. Lorne Campbell, "Portraiture," in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 25, ed. Jane Turner (London: Macmillan, 1996), 275–276.

87. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Portrait*, trans. Sarah Clift and Simon Sparks (New York: Stanford UP, 2018), 13 (*Le Regard du portrait*, Paris: Galilée, 2000, 11); cf. Martta Heikkilä, "Meeting with Oneself: The Work of Art as Portrait," in *The Event of Encounter in Art and Philosophy*, eds. Kuisma Korhonen and Pajari Räsänen (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2010), 245–273.

88. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 4 (*Au fond des images*, 16).

89. Cf. Jean-Christophe Bailly, *Le champ mimétique* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 45; Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art*, 64, 72.

90. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

91. Nancy, *Portrait*, 48, cf. 82 (*L'Autre Portrait*, Paris: Galilée, 2014, 17, cf. 73).

92. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art*, 48.

93. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 64–65 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 68–69); *Penser à ne pas voir*, 164–166 ("À dessein, le dessin").

94. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 55–56 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 59–60).

95. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art*, 117–118.

96. Arthur Rimbaud's letter to Georges Izambard at Charleville, May 13, 1871. For example https://www.dispatchespoetrywars.com/documents/arthur-rimbaud-to-georges-izambard-13-may-1871/.

97. Nancy, *Portrait*, 22–28 (*Le Regard du portrait*, 41–52).

98. Nancy, *Portrait*, 53, 56–58 (*L'Autre Portrait*, 27, 32–33).

99. As I have suggested elsewhere, this notion has some remarkable implications to the recent culture of self-portrait photographs or "selfies." See Martta Heikkilä, "From the Self-Image to the Image Itself: Portrait in Jean-Luc Nancy's Philosophy and in the Contemporary Visual Culture," *Glimpse: Society for Phenomenology and Media* 21, no. 2 (2020): 18–22.

100. Nancy, *Portrait*, 89–91 (*L'Autre Portrait*, 87).

101. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 7 (*Au fond des images*, 21).

102. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art*, 31–72.

103. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art*, 47.

104. See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 75–81 (orig. 1966).

105. Nancy, *Portrait*, 49 (*L'Autre Portrait*, 18).

106. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 219–220 (*De la grammatologie*, 313–314).

107. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 55 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 59).

108. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 2–3 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 10–11).

Chapter 2

Beyond Presence

Form and Figure

Since Antiquity, the notion of artistic form has been one of the central objects of research in philosophical and art theoretical discussions, and the interest in form has extended to a variety of orientations. In Derrida, as with several other poststructuralist thinkers, the notion of form appears often implicitly and in the context of other topics. Rather than on explaining form as a positive concept, his attention is on the critique of the philosophy of form; this applies both to art and more general ideas associated with form. In his critique, Derrida addresses most importantly the historical divide into oppositions such as form and matter that has been one of the principal tenets in modernist theories of art.

The question of what constitutes "form" has been of particular interest to philosophers and answering to it has suggested that the concept of form is multifaceted in meanings. Even in ancient times, form and figure were fundamental concepts in the examination of how art may represent things. Form, as opposed to "accidental," multiple particulars, often comes close to the concepts of idea and figure. Like form, also idea and figure have proved extremely ambiguous. The thinking of form has often relied upon the thinking of regular, solid, and clear-cut presence of either an abstract idea or a perceptible model, a pattern, a visible idea (*eidos*) or shape (*morphē*). These have been supposed to receive another kind of presence in the work of art, or more generally, among the sensible phenomena of the world.

Obviously, such discussion of form and figure relates with the mimetic notion of art. For Plato, the perceptible phenomena were shadows imitating the immutable, intelligible Form.[1] In practice, the mimetic conception of art would mean that the artist will repeat or represent another thing in the outcome of his or her work, like a tree, a person or an idea, reproducing it in another format—for example, in a pencil drawing, or as a character of a play

or a novel. It is evident that Derrida's interpretation of form deviates essentially from the accounts that are founded in a model concerning form as presence, as does, for example, Heidegger's thinking before Derrida. Rather than presence that is always unattainable for them, the form designates a formless object with no recognizable form, and yet an object that will give an identifiable, familiar form to other objects according to the process of inclusion and trace.[2] Instead of abstract, permanent form, the notions of difference, process, becoming, and writing have emerged in Derrida's philosophy, in which any meaning may receive some form only in relation to other things. The form or figure is thus not visible in itself, but it has to be made visible: it exists only in intervals and differences between things.

Historically, and depending on the objectives of each theory, "form" appears in two principal ways. As a concept, it can pertain to both abstract ideas and universal properties and qualities. Alternatively, form can also refer to sensuous, concrete phenomena: to distinguishable figures, motifs, or other kinds of perceptible formations in concrete, material objects, such as a work of art. For instance, it can mean the appearance of a clearly defined idea, a triangular form, for instance, or the shape of a thing or a person. Furthermore, "form" can refer to a figure, a particular condition, character, or mode in which something appears, as well as procedure and conduct.

During the past few decades, the investigation of form in philosophy of art has taken on new dimensions, especially theories associated with the poststructuralist tradition. In these, the form of art seems to have expanded its field to something that necessarily relates to either matter or content, or to formlessness, as has been proposed by Derrida and, before him, Georges Bataille and Martin Heidegger. Beauty, which until the present appears as the foremost aesthetic value, has referred to the thinking of the regular, solid, and clear-cut form. The influence of the Kantian theory of the sublime has made many philosophers consider the loss of form as the basis of art. In place of the abstract form, Bataille, Heidegger, and recent French philosophers have brought into discussion formlessness and materiality in the experience of art. As a result, form has been an object of constant reconsideration, but its versatility as a concept still seems to raise interest today. Especially, the affinity of "form" with "figure" appears important in contemporary thinking of art.

In this framework, Derrida's analysis of form reflects the development that has taken place in theories of both philosophy and art from the 1960s onwards. They are united by the idea that formlessness and materiality are not simple opposites of form as has been presented in many previous theories, in philosophy, and by theoreticians of modernist art. The recent and contemporary notion of form is often fundamentally connected to the formless, to matter, and content—issues that have earlier been understood as the

reverse of form. In Derrida, among other contemporary thinkers, form and figure exist between concepts and materiality rather than belonging solely to any of these.

THE HISTORICAL CONCEPTS OF FORM AND MATTER

An initial way to define form has been to contrast it with matter. The differentiation between matter and form has its origin in metaphysics of Antiquity, especially in Plato and Aristotle, in which form refers to the structure or essence of a thing. As such, form is differentiated from its matter.

Plato's theory of Forms is a realist ontology of universals. This theory is used as synonymous to his theory of Ideas. Plato believed that there must be an essence—or Form—common to everything falling under one concept. Plato divides reality into the material realm and the transcendental realm of Forms. Forms are abstract and nonmaterial; yet they are substantial. The Form or Idea is the permanent reality that makes anything what it is. For instance, a chair is a chair because it "participates in" the Form of a Chair. In addition, Form contrasts with the particulars of that Form which are finite and thus subject to change. Plato did not make the distinction between forms and matter explicit in any of his dialogues—yet, in his Theory of Forms it can be read implicitly, particularly in *Phaedo* and the *Republic*.[3] Since any particular material thing is subject to change, this entails that when the particular thing ceases to exist, it is no longer what it was but merely dead matter. The Idea of a thing, however, is changeless, for it is imperceptible, incorporeal, and eternal. We can come to have knowledge of these Forms only through thought. Thus, for Plato, the Idea or Form enjoys a higher status than the particulars or actual things, which merely participate in the one unchanging and eternal Form. The "Platonic" forms are united essentially to the concept of truth: for Plato, form refers to what is essential in a thing. Later, Heidegger opposes this conception: the truth does not exist as presentness.[4] Instead, it has to be unfolded and brought to light: the truth *happens*, which means that it does not correspond with any available form or idea. If the truth of the thing as it reveals itself assumes any form, it is the form of the truth's coming into being.

In Antiquity, the concept of *eidos* refers to form in the "abstract" sense of universals, which are attainable only through intellect. Form conceived of as *eidos* has to be differentiated from the concept of *morphē*, which means the more concrete shape or outward appearance of a thing. *Morphē* embodied its essential inner substance, so that these existed in harmony. Although Aristotle agrees that forms are closely tied to intelligibility, he denies that they would be identifiable. Aristotle's definition of form differs from that

of Plato in that it consists of the conceptual separation of form and matter. Matter, designated by the concepts of *hylē* and *hypokeimenon*, underlies and persists through substantial changes, and a substance is generated when matter takes on form, since form or essence must always be the form or essence *of* something.[5]

Even though Aristotle distinguishes form from matter, in sensible objects they are inseparable: forms exist in sensible objects, not in a Platonic realm of abstract ideas. Form determines the properties of the object, but these properties cannot exist without a subject in which they adhere. Respectively, matter provides a substratum in which the properties of the object adhere. Hence, Aristotle argues, matter does not have any properties by itself, nor does it exist without form.[6] By contrast, nature is the shape or form that is specified in the definition of each thing.[7] Without the form specific to the thing, nature is only potentially, say, flesh or bone, but as Aristotle claims, it "has not yet its own nature, and does not exist by nature," until it receives the specified definition, which we name in defining what flesh or bone is.[8] As a result, the form is nature rather than the matter. Things have themselves a principle of motion; form is needed so that natural compounds can move from potentiality to actuality.

Along with these references, "form" has a multiplicity of other uses. In ancient Greek, the concepts *eidos*, *idea*, *morphē*, and *schēma* were interconnected, as well as *rythmos*. Instead of making form simply an opposite of "content," "matter," "ground," or "appearance," these words were bound to *multiply* the opposite genres and the problems involved in them.[9] This plurality of references can be seen to act as a precursor of the twentieth-century developments of the notion of form.

The desire for forms constitutes one of the key terms in theories of art. They seem to rely on the assumption that the form of art is *present* in one way or another. According to Georges Didi-Huberman, the notion of form as presence, or even as presentness, has been prevalent in traditional theories of art. They have either rejected form as presence or taken the form to mean "real" and "full" presence.[10] Its deconstruction is one of Derrida's aims, as is the deconstruction of form as a principle that would offer a permanent essence to art. This point is in sharp contrast to modernist theories of art, in which the distinction of form and matter is still valid: the artistic form holds a privileged position in the aesthetic evaluation of works of art, whereas the expressed contents appear trivial, even unimportant as a criterion of art. The poststructuralist conception of form is directed against this differentiation. However, Derrida hardly questions the notion that art, as such, has a form that belongs to it; he does not tell explicitly what this form would be. Therefore, the question of form is left open in his philosophy—or it is a coming form.

FORMALISM AND DECONSTRUCTION: THE MODERNIST FORM OF ART

In theories of art, the question of form has been important, even so far as modernist or formalist theoreticians of art have implied that "form" is the very concept of "art"; in our interactions with works of art, form should thus be given primacy. Formalism is not one specific theory but rather a general orientation that emphasizes the intrinsic form of the artwork—that is, the perceptible properties that constitute it as a work of art—as well as the notion of autonomous art. Formalism presented the paradigm for the reception and interpretation of modern art of the twentieth century. Above all, Formalists emphasized the specificity of art based on its medium. The notion of form was rooted in the expression that was defined by the artistic medium that several critics, such as Clement Greenberg (1909–1994), considered to be particular to each of the arts.[11] Thus, art displayed purity and a self-critical tendency at the same time. Every work of art was thought to advance the self-definition of an art and thereby participate in the redefinition of the concept of art.

Those who use the concept of form usually wish to differentiate the artifact from its relations to entities outside it; here, the artifact is primarily designates an object. At the same time, the artifact differs from its representing or symbolizing various things, its being expressive of things and its being the product of the intentions of the artist, its evoking states of mind in beholders, and even its standing in various relations of influence and similarity to preceding, succeeding, and contemporary works.[12] In Formalist, and more generally modernist, accounts, what is important in art is the aesthetic or artistic form, although it cannot be separated from content.[13] "Form" refers here to the specific characteristics that make it possible for a spectator to recognize an object as a work of art among all things of the world. Nevertheless, these qualities are thought to give both the concept of the "work of art" and artistic practices an integrity and coherence in the tradition of art as a continuous tradition and in the tradition represented by the particular arts. The core of the theory of modernism is, therefore, in many cases equivalent in meaning with Formalism: according to their theoreticians, what is important in art and makes it different from everything else is its intrinsic form or visual aspects. Within the work of art, the form and the content should fully coincide. This is to say that the narrative contents of the work of art, such as the psychological, political, or social reality reflected in it, are not significant with respect to the aesthetic value of the artifact—only its appearance and the inherent aesthetic qualities are, according to the Formalist theory.

In speaking of art, form may apply to the concrete, physical appearance of the work of art, such as the framed, flat, and rectangular shape of a painting, or the shape of a material object. Accordingly, the critic should address

the features that were thought to constitute a painting. This interpretation of artistic form has emerged in particular in the modernist theories of art since the 1930s.[14] Accordingly, Formalist art criticism is all about considering the value of the artwork as art, referring to the conditions that are unique to its specific form and media.

On these grounds, art appeared as a feat of the artist's individual vision and talent and the originality of his creative activity. The criteria for the reception and evaluation of art were relatively clear, since art was considered a realm that aesthetically, socially, and economically differed from everything else. Especially, theorists of modernism reacted against the capitalist society and commodification of culture. This attitude was represented by Theodor Adorno, who highlighted in his philosophy the radical autonomy of the work of art and its difference from phenomena such as mass culture.[15] Formalist thinking on art emphasized the specificity of art based on its medium.

In Formalist theories of the twentieth century, the form of art cannot be thought of independently of the question of medium-specificity: the artistic medium gives the form of art. The Greenbergian notion of form was predominantly rooted in the expression which was defined by the artistic medium particular to each of the arts. Thus, art would display purity and a self-critical tendency at the same time. Every work of art was therefore thought to advance the self-definition of an art and participate in the redefinition of the concept of "art." G. E. Lessing, a German poet of Enlightenment, already introduced this notion in his essay *Laocoön* (1766).[16] In this essay, he articulated the difference between poetry (art with words), the temporal forms of art, painting (art with physical bodies, including sculpture, painting, and architecture) and the spatial arts.

Yet, "form" did not limit itself to the mere concrete outcome of artistic work but also referred to the potentialities of what are reached by using different means in art. For Clement Greenberg, art was progression from representation to abstraction. Abstraction was a logical culmination of such self-consciousness.[17] Abstract art can be defined to be independent from visual references to the world and any kind of visual reality.[18] For Formalist criticism, there is perhaps finally no difference between the form and the content of the work of art, in the sense that the form of the work *is* its content. This notion of abstraction reflects Hegel's influence on modernist criticism.

Theorists of Modernity required from art an intensifying self-consciousness of its own means. From the viewpoint of theories of art, Formalist criticism is inconsistent with Hegel's aesthetic ideal. For Hegel, aesthetics is a philosophy of art that understands the work and also the beauty of art as the crystallization and embodiment of an "Idea": "the sensuous presentation of the Absolute itself."[19] According to Hegel's theory, form and content are perfectly integrated within a work of art. For Hegel, the Idea is always

opposed to the mindlessness matter or nature. The free mind of the artist, or Freedom, creates art, which gives an idea to nature. This idea is the unity of the externality or objectivity of nature and the subjectivity or personal vision of the artist; art never imitates nature as such for the very reason that nature is mindless.[20] The beauty of art is in a higher position than natural beauty for the reason that art is a form of "absolute" truth, in which matter and form (or concept) are united, as well as necessity and freedom, and the universal and the particular. However, the truth of art does not possess a form that would uniquely belong to it, as religion and philosophy can present the truth even more perfectly. The beauty inherent in both nature and art therefore lose their autonomy in Hegel's view.

On such grounds, Hegel questions the Platonic view of mimesis, which is based on the production of truth, that is to say, the equivalence between things. It would be produced, for example, by presenting a given thing in a different medium or in a different form. According to Hegel, the work of art is not an immediate correlate of an idea, but the Idea or Truth becomes sensible in works of art so that it shines through their sensible figure, *Schein*. Although *Schein* implies to Hegel appearance and illusion, its meaning is not negative in the sense of false impression. Instead, the concepts of "impression" and "perception" implied by *Schein* suggest that art appears to us irreversibly through a sensuous figure.[21] Beauty in art is the emanation of the Absolute or Truth through an object. Beauty can be shown only in a sensuous form called the Ideal, which transcends the Idea to become a special form. Nature and Idea are in a dialectical relation to one another, but together they create an organism, the work of art. In Formalism, by contrast, form is the only important factor in a work of art.

Although Hegel's philosophy of art thus differs from the Formalist account that emphasizes the primacy of form, Hegel's theory is nevertheless part of the development of the modernist notion of art, especially seen from the perspective that art is valuable for its own sake, *as* works of art. This makes work of art self-sufficient: by virtue of their artistic form, namely their visual aspects and the way the work is made, they differ from everything else. Such conception demands that art employs means of presentation and media that belong uniquely to art. At the same time, the Formalist idea presupposes that art is appreciated on the grounds of aesthetic experience that bases on direct sensation of the object. For Kant, aesthetic judgments are "disinterested" in that they are sensations of unconstrained and detached pleasure. The Kantian disinterestedness involved in the judgment of beauty thus characterizes the experience.[22] This is what gives objects a specific aesthetic value and place in the tradition of works of art. Consequently, in modernist theories each work of art is expected to comment on the concept of art, while it does not refer beyond its existence as art, to narration and anything that might produce an

illusion of reality. If the work of art does so, this is not the primary criterion for appreciating and evaluating art.

As a predominant practice of interpreting art, Formalism has been criticized as outmoded several decades ago. The argument of this criticism is that formalistic accounts tend to ignore the contextual, such as social and political, aspects of the works of art. The target of the critics of strict Formalism, Derrida among them, seems to be the perceived ideological charge of keeping to formalist criteria, thus neglecting the wider implications of art.[23]

FROM THE PRESENCE OF FORMS TO FORM AS BECOMING OF DIFFERENCE

Deriving from Plato, the notion of form has been understood as permanence: as idea, concept, and truth. With a number of recent philosophers, like Heidegger, Bataille, Jean-François Lyotard, and Derrida, this notion has turned from abstraction into becoming, event and materiality. In Derrida's philosophy, the concept of form is configured as writing, trace, trait, and *différance*. None of these concepts is intended to involve the meaning of representation or production of things according to an existing model, either a concrete object or an abstract idea. Instead, they imply original production, or that any coming into being of meaning is already reproduction.[24] Derrida's notions of *différance* and writing, brought in place of form, suggest the productive origin of things beyond rational representations. Trace, difference, and *trait* cannot therefore be presented in any figure or form, nor can one make a figure of them, because they are the possibility of figure or form: form is always only *coming*.[25]

Derrida rejects "form" conceived of as presence. This project is visible in many twentieth-century philosophers, and it has received a variety of interpretations. Martin Heidegger's critique of the "metaphysics of presence," or being understood as presence, is one of the central responses to the tradition that has sought to question the earlier foundations of form in philosophy.[26] Heidegger's focus is on the metaphysical way of thinking of being as a kind of presence—more exactly, on the idea that the present is unveiled starting from presence. His discussion of what he terms "presencing" is grounded on his view of the antecedence of the horizon of being; instead of this, Heidegger brings the idea that being is without ground, or that its ground is groundless (*Abgrund*). The notion of groundlessness appears in German Idealism, for example, in Schelling and Hegel. Derrida has rethought in a remarkable fashion the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics, in which the concept of form is overcome. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida's challenge of metaphysics issues from his revelation that phenomenology presupposes the very

metaphysics of presence that founded the ontology of the transcendental subject. According to the current notion, the ground of phenomenology is the phenomenon, and to the subject the phenomenon is conceived as presence. In Derrida, however, the presence and every "now" point it consists of exists in neither time nor space. Instead, they are always already compromised by what he calls "trace." Trace is a residue of a previous experience that prevents us from ever being in a self-contained "now" moment.[27] Along with "trace," the adjoining notion of *différance* or the origin of sense without origin are aspects that are crucial to Derrida's thinking on art and artistic form in particular.

Apart from the philosophical motivation of Derrida's critical treatise of form, he reacts to the modernist self-awareness of art, that is, models of thinking of artistic form in which the principle of "art for art's sake" is predominant. In Derrida, the function and nature of form differ notably from both the modernist notion of form in art and the legacy of the Hegelian notion, which relies upon the union of form and content. In Hegel, the unity of expression between artistic form and content appears as the foremost criterion for a work of art.[28] By contrast, for Derrida, art is always overdetermined with respect to its concept and thus never corresponds to its concept. Instead, as Michel Gaillot has put it, art in Derrida is an incessant opening of forms in each work of art. There, the intelligible touches the sensible, or the infinite touches the finite, each time singularly.[29] This happens in the irreducible plurality or multiplicity of the details of the work that is the sole reason for the existence of the work. Thus, the function of art is none other than to be renewed or reborn incessantly.[30] This is to say that the form in art does not exist before the work, but the form is born simultaneously with and in the material work.

Derrida's theory of the artistic form hence proceeds beyond the concepts of form, Idea, or Truth, as opposed to matter. As he argues, historical theories have sought in art "a one-and-naked meaning" (*un sens un et nu*), which would provide the content of the work of art but, at the same time, remains distinct from the form of the work.[31] The distinction of form and content means that one has made of art in general an object, in which one claims to distinguish an inner meaning, the invariant, and a multiplicity of external variants through which, "as through so many veils, one would try to see or restore the true, full, originary meaning: one, naked."[32] In thinking of art and especially in answering the question "What is art?," Derrida perceives several oppositions in use, which all form a circle: for example, meaning and form, inside and outside, content and container, signified and signifier, and represented and representer, in all of which teleology and hierarchy are prescribed.

Derrida considers the distinction between form and content untenable because no work of art is possible without a material support.[33] This claim is intended to break the circularity between meaning and form: it is impossible to take apart the material ground of a work of art from its contents or

any abstract idea that might be associated with the work. For this reason, it is equally impossible to transform simply a concept or a message into the expression of art: the concept or underlying idea is undetachable from the singular appearance of the work, given on its material basis. The form is thus *in* the matter itself, not in the "invisible or hidden god," nor in either intelligible or sensible reality.[34] The form is, then, equivalent to what Derrida calls the *trait*. On the grounds of such conclusion, as it seems, Derrida is interested in what remains as untranslatable and singular: what is either never said in the work or can be understood in many ways. These features are multiple: the idiom of "truth in painting," the singular character of each *trait*, the impossibility to translate the title of the work or the author's signature and the fundamental invisibility inherent to the work of art, produced by the multiplicity of *traits*.[35] The untranslatable is what remains outside of all discourses in that it is undecidable and impossible to define.

Derrida's account of form does focus on neither the imitation of a given model nor form as opposed to content, in which case an invisible form would be effectuated into a visible one. Rather, his understanding of form has similarity with the *trait* that organizes the work and, unlike color, for instance, is yet nothing sensible. The inappearing *trait* acts like *différance*: out of absence, it gives form to the form itself.[36] This makes it a "form in formation," reminiscent of what Jean-Luc Nancy has articulated on the ground of Romantic theories.[37] In place of an immutable Idea, the Idea that Nancy refers to is active and born in the movement of drawing or other kind operation in which material gains a form in the process of making. As Nancy argues in *Le Plaisir au dessin*, every form has its origin in formlessness, and each form to be drawn surpasses all other existing forms. The formlessness of the drawing has also another aspect. Nancy's notion of the form that takes form or gives itself form, *forma formans*, is founded in the theories of Romanticism. That the form takes its own form means that the drawing would lack form completely. On the contrary, the drawing has a shape or an Idea, but such an Idea does not exist anywhere before it is outlined in the drawing. The Idea is the true form of the drawing; it is the act of drawing and an end in itself, the drawing of the line that precedes the draughtsman's desire to show the precise form and leave its trace.[38] Thus, to show a thing equals leaving a trace on a surface. Here Nancy is speaking of a "coming form" (*la forme à venir*), which inevitably receives a visible figure in the drawing and thus manifests itself.[39] In other words, the figure created by the line is to give a figure to a thing, and the line is produced by the act or movement required by the drawing.[40]

Derrida and Nancy are thus unanimous in stating that the artistic form does not exist outside of the work of art, but each work involves a *forma formans*, "form in formation," the barely formed that opens all other forms,

in the sense that no form of art exists before the work of art becomes realized.[41] The form is, thus, not an idea or any kind of abstraction, but it resides in the works of art, in their concreteness. This is to say that the abstract "message" of the work cannot be translated and transferred to any other work, because the form or the concept is *in* the material itself: in the way in which the minute details are elaborated, in their composition and the relations between the elements inside the work. What both Derrida and Nancy seem to argue is that the emergence of the meaning is possible on the grounds of the internal factors of the work and, as soon as they are experienced, they appear in their context formed by both their concrete surroundings and more abstract elements, such as phenomena of art, theory, and societal issues. These networks are singular and hence inimitable and irreducible to any available, general concept, and inseparable from the arising meanings of the work.

BEYOND FORM: DERRIDA'S TRACE

That the opening of forms is the opening of the gap between the conceptual and the sensible means that these realms never fully coincide in the work of art. What art offers us is thus not the "thing itself" or any definite signification, but a *trait* or trace—a gap, of which one cannot make a figure. The *trait* of a painting that both produces figures and remains without figure appears to vision as the unfigurable.[42] The *trait* is thus pure immediacy; its duplicity as figurable and nonfigurable cannot be overcome. If art seems to imitate or represent another thing, this means dealing with the realm of figures, whereas the *trait* exceeds all that may be figured. In Andrea Potestà's words, such figuration is "silent and secret," and hence "mute and ultra-semantic residuality."[43] The "silence" of art means that it is as impossible to turn it into words as it is impossible to renounce speaking of art.

Their differing movement originates from what Derrida terms *différance* and spacing, which refers to birth into space in time without ground.[44] The trace or trait does not produce a form, figure, or permanent signification, but the trait is the place for the birth of sense—a place of opening of any kind of meaning. Instead, art thus gives us an excess of sense.[45] The truth of art is thus not its signification but sense that is not stabile and present as such in the work of art, but opens up in every encounter with the work. This notion is also decisive for Nancy's idea of art as well as the plurality of senses that do not appear in an ideal fashion but only in their singular instances.[46] The notion that art exceeds all existing figures and significations leads us to ask what deconstruction and unworking (*désœuvrement*) mean in both Derrida and Nancy.

For Derrida, meanings emerge in the context of other things. This is to say that they are lacking a present, solid form, such as the concept that would be the source of signification.

What in his accounts unites writing and the visual image is the idea that they consist of traces. In language, the meaning of what is said is never present as such in the linguistic sign. Our grasp of any text is only partial and the ways in which we conceive it are as endless as they may be conflicting. This is due to Derrida's central idea that there is no present text in general, not even a past present text: the text cannot be approached in an originary or modified form of presence.[47] Instead, every text is composed of pure traces, or differences. Thus, their presence is characterized by its never being real: presence is always put into work, spaced and temporalized.[48] Therefore, one can, and must, doubt whether "form" is even a relevant concept in Derrida's thinking of trace and difference. If "form" has designated in earlier theories more or less the object itself, no matter whether it really had an immediately recognizable form or not, such object was still able to *give* form to other objects by the negative process of inclusion and imprint. Before, form was in relation to something that it was *not*: it gave a key for recognizing and interpreting other objects—form gave them an aspect of familiarity and a definition. This may be called the semiotic notion of form that is based on relations between things. Yet already in the Greek vocabulary associated with form, its scope soon became more complex. In Derrida's opinion, this development has come to its extreme, form being no longer an opposite of "content" or "matter."[49] This view resembles Georges Bataille's idea of formless matter that both comprehends and exceeds philosophical discourses and language in general.

On such grounds, the focus of Derrida's analysis is to show that the meaning of the image is never simply present: the work of art may show us something, not on condition of what is represented, but rather due to what remains *between* the depicted lines: these are the invisible graphic forms or of writing.

Beauty, which traditionally is the foremost aesthetic value, has referred to the thinking of regular, solid, and clear-cut form.[50] In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant presents a theory of the aesthetic judgment, also known as the judgment of taste or the judgment of beauty. In the experience of the beautiful, the subject presents to him- or herself the form of the beautiful. This form is born in the free play between two faculties of the mind or cognitive powers, namely imagination and understanding. Famously, the free play is "without a concept" (*ohne Begriff*) in Kant,[51] in that it is not determined by a concept of the object, but merely by a subjective feeling: "If one judges objects merely in accordance with concepts, then all representation of beauty is lost. Thus there can also be no rule in accordance with which someone

could be compelled to acknowledge something as beautiful."[52] The feeling of the beautiful is, by nature, a feeling of pleasure.

Derrida's aim is to show the limits of the Kantian thinking of beauty. To Derrida's mind, Kant does not recognize these limits. Instead, there is always residue to his system of beauty, which is therefore not universal. The limits remain therefore unconscious to Kant; actually, as Derrida understands it, any system holds unconscious limits. These viewpoints have been reconsidered and even renounced, but the concept of form is still of interest today because it seems to be endlessly multifaceted and versatile. The notion of form belongs to the domain of geometry, ideas, morphology, signification, and abstraction, and everything that can be gathered under a rational, conceptual unity—that is, into the sphere of "the same." Its "opposite" notions are formlessness and form that is not fully accomplished but only in the state of taking shape; matter, sensuousness, and the body are associated with such form. Formlessness, matter, and the body all escape the unity of concepts and represent especially in Bataille's philosophy excess, difference, multiplicity, and dispersal—everything that in art and elsewhere seems to resist the objectifying reason. It leaves space for further questions that are relevant to deconstructionist thinkers alike: what kinds of forms does formlessness tend to take, and how do we perceive the "formless" in contemporary art?

Derrida and Nancy even more emphasize art as a proliferating, multiplying practice that is destined to surpass its earlier phenomena and hence its own concept. However, in a situation where the forms and practices of art are constantly subject to change, it is still necessary to reconsider the meaning of "art." Different experiments and the testing of the limits of artistic presentation and materials are an essential part—and even the motivation—of today's artistic actions. If the concept of art is what gives their form, we may ask what the contents of "art" and the "work of art" are today and whether it is possible or even necessary to give "art" a positive meaning at all. If we agree that appearances of contemporary art are too multiple to give the concept of art a coherent and unified form, the question lingers what the artistic form would be the form of. Is it the visible form of the phenomena, or the form of the concepts referred to by the works of art—such as in the case of political or other kinds of activist art that? In this instance, as it seems, art is expected to create its "subject matter" within the operations of work itself, rather than merely represent associated concepts.

TRUTH IN PAINTING: MODEL WITHOUT A FORM

In *The Truth in Painting*, the notion of form appears in three contexts. In the essay "Passe-Partout," Derrida introduces the concept of form from the

viewpoint given by Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art* (1935–1936). He also presents the differentiation between form and content that, according to Heidegger, has prevailed in "all art theory and aesthetics."[53] In "Restitutions," Derrida deals in turn with the notion of truth in art in the context of van Gogh's painting that is allegedly called *An Old Shoe with Laces*. The form is brought out here from the viewpoint of model: a shoe as a model for the painted shoe. For Derrida, this model proves imaginary in Meyer Schapiro's (1904–1996) treatise of the same painting, "The Still Life as a Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh" (1968).[54] Derrida wants to show is that, unlike Schapiro suggests, the shoe that Heidegger speaks of in *The Origin of the Work of Art* is not painted after a real shoe for made for a real foot in any circumstances, but the painted shoe is necessarily an imagined one. The shoe remains without a model. Derrida thus reads Heidegger against Schapiro: even if there was a model for the painted shoe, Derrida claims, the model is not the truth or form behind the painting, which would in this case be a mere representation of the real object. The model is by nature a "prosthetic" one, and hence supplementary with respect to van Gogh's painting.[55] The discourse of the shoes is thus detachable from the real thing, but it is attached to it like an original supplement.[56]

In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger criticizes the attempts of the history of metaphysics to define the thing as substance that would consist of matter and form. He sees the distinction of matter and form to be the general conceptual framework in aesthetics. According to Heidegger's argument, the matter–form structure appears in theories as if it stemmed from the nature of the work of art and from the thing itself.[57] In this scheme, in a block of granite, form means the way in which the material parts are arranged in special locations, so that they result in a particular shape. In a jug, an axe or a shoe, however, the form functions otherwise: unlike in a block of stone, the form determines the arrangement of the matter and prescribes its selection. The aim of the selection is the usefulness of the thing (*Ding*), which thus becomes determined as a piece of equipment (*Zeug*) that is intended for a specific purpose. The entity thus created is conceived as unity of *materia* and *forma*.[58]

With this analysis, Heidegger's aim is to think what stays outside the conceptual pair of matter and form, which for him sounds even too natural in the speaking both the categories of ordinary things and work of art, as well as equipment, which is located as if between them. What he wants to bring forth is to consider the work of art *without* the notion of form and the conceptual dimension it gives to things—for example, determining their purpose of use. More important to Heidegger is the significance of the matter itself of the work of art, its "thingly character," which so far has remained unthought in theories.[59] As Heidegger proposes, the thingness resides in the material itself—in stone, wood, color, and sound. His question is then: what happens

if the materiality of works of art is not subsumed under concepts, but instead, we "leave the thing to rest in its own self," to "rest upon itself in its very own being"?[60]

Heidegger's endeavor is to think of art otherwise than departing from the scheme that divides the work of art in two components: to form, the abstract conceptual element, or the invisible idea in the artist's mind, and to matter that the artist modifies it according to the intended form. Form is then something that we know: something that is available to us and is present and permanent in its being. For Heidegger, the notion that things consist of form and matter derives from the conception that equipment are already familiar to our thinking. However, the work of art exceeds the character of mere usefulness of the equipment. The truth of a tool, for example, lies in its usefulness, while the truth of the work of art is elsewhere. By taking up the notion of the work art, Heidegger introduces the thought that in the work is a question of the taking place of the truth. Such truth must be *revealed*. In art, the usefulness of the equipment, such as van Gogh's peasant shoes, is not found in the way the painted shoes are useful as such, or in the fact that the painting would imitate the forms of reality. In fact, Heidegger opposes a notion of the truth of the work of art that would be understood as imitation or representation.[61] Instead, the work of art opens up the truth, or makes it happen from the material basis of the work: in the painting, the truth "emerges into the unconcealedness of its being."[62] The work can pictorially represent something that is: what van Gogh's painting of peasant shoes reveals is how the represented object is. Yet, only the work of art is able to present us the "reliability" of the shoes and, along with it, the world of the peasant woman and the whole atmosphere to which the painting seems to be referring. The truth of the work has thus to be *produced* and made present; in how the truth discloses itself beginning from this particular painting by van Gogh, it has existed nowhere before: "The work as work, in its presencing, is a setting forth [*Herstellung*], a making."[63] What the work thus sets forth is to be explored.

Heidegger adopts a view according to which the essence of art is to be the bearer of the happening of truth: art is the place for the setting itself to work of truth (*Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit*).[64] Departing from the fact that there is a pair of shoes represented in the painting, the work reveals their character of equipment.[65] Hence, Heidegger tries to interpret the truth of the work as disclosedness—in Greek, *aletheia*—which precedes the notion of truth as correspondence. This is necessary in order to disengage with the Platonic view of art as imitation of a form or an idea. The specific importance of art is, thus, that it makes being appear in its truth: as *Lichtung*, "clearing" or "lighting." In art, *physis* is revealed by *techne*, and only on the ground of *physis* does *techne* come into being.

Therefore, being seems even to need art to appear; without art, it would not appear by itself.

The open space of truth that will happen in the work of art is thus nothing permanent but rather an event. In addition, the way in which it emerges depends on the historical moment and environment of the opening. From the perspective of the form, Heidegger is seeking a form that rather emerges singularly in the work of art than means a model for its making. Similar features characterize Derrida's inquiry of form: variability and instability, and the formation depending on the context. Indeed, in his hands these qualities have become even more radical than in Heidegger: instead of being abstract and conceptually solid idea, the notion of form has transformed into a process of becoming for Derrida. It exists as writing that does not hold signification in itself, but may become meaningful only in relations with other things. Therefore, signification is nothing but *sense* in space and time. Similarly, no form, figure or image cannot be readily available to us, but it has to be *made* visible and sought in differences, gaps, and intervals—in spaces between concepts and matter.

For deconstructionist philosophers such as Derrida and Nancy, the notion of form and figure do not amount to clearly defined images or anything that might be called a "work." In place of work, *œuvre*, there is deconstruction and unworking in that art goes beyond all figures and significations.

Philosophically, Derrida's motivation for art beyond the schemes of figure and stable form can be searched in Heidegger's critique of the metaphysics of presence. With this, Heidegger refers to the tradition of understanding being as (constant) presence.[66] Derrida contributes to this critique by bringing to the place of "presence" the notions of *différance*, trace, *trait*, spacing, and *khôra*: being as spaced and temporalized, which appears in traces or vestiges only. Thereby, also the idea of truth as presence disappears and "the presence of what is gets lost." It disperses and multiplies itself through mimemes, and this disappearance becomes the condition of all truth.[67] In many of Derrida's texts about works of art, seriality and similarity among the works provides an important point of view, for example, in paintings by Colette Deblé and Jean-Michel Atlan. It is possible to think that repeated, reminiscent features produce "form" or at least a sort of iterative principle to the production and reception of Deblé's and Atlan's paintings.[68] However, despite the fact that Derrida recognizes the similarities between the works and treats their character of seriality as an important theme of his analyses, his point is that seriality does not produce the category of "the same," but, like writing, it rather acts as a source of endless differences.

That the works of art appear to have resembling techniques, colors, figures and the like allow us to perceive repetition in them. Yet, this does not mean that repetition would be grounded in the representation of an originary form or model that would yield the "truth" for the artist's work. Rather, in Derrida repetition itself is the movement of untruth. In its movement, the presence of disappearance becomes dispersed and multiplies itself in mimemes, icons, phantasms, and simulacra. Mihai Spariosu has called this repetition the possibility of sensible becoming and non-ideality. It refers to non-philosophy, bad memory, hypomnesis, and writing.[69] The Derridean *différance* at the ground of the movement in which signification never returns to the same—and therefore does not possess an ideal form—is a structural notion and takes place in time. It includes both the delay of an "always deferred presence" and the place of origin, the *khôra* where the differences at work in each "present" are structured.[70] The "origin" of things is therefore always neither full nor simple: it is a trace, a structured and differentiating origin of differences.[71] *Différence* exists in what Derrida calls temporization, which at once implies spacing; *différence* is in the suspension between the becoming-space of time and becoming-time of space (*devenir-temps de l'espace et devenir-espace du temps*). It is thus suspended between space and time that are heterogeneous and indissociable.[72]

According to Georges Didi-Huberman, the deconstructed notion of presence is not real: presence arrives only as operation (*œuvrée*), spaced and temporalized, as trace or vestige.[73] Didi-Huberman's question is, then, if it is still possible to speak of form in the situation where the word "trace" comes to the forefront in Derrida's theory. Didi-Huberman's answer to this question is negative: as he maintains, with earlier philosophers the "form" has meant above all an object that remains itself without an immediately recognizable form. Form is an object that, nevertheless, has given form to other objects according to a double process of inclusion and negative imprint, in other words, trace. Form is an act that allows to other things an aspect of familiarity and makes one to understandable in their definition.[74] Thus, if we suppose that the purpose of form is to supply a principle of producing "the same," Derrida's and other deconstructionists' aim is the opposite: to show that difference, lack of origin, and nonidentity are the ground of things.

FORM AND THE FORMLESS

Especially after Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art*, many continental philosophers have begun to understand art's existence as event that in essence

is conceivable beyond concepts and forms. Although Heidegger does not explicitly refer to the Kantian notion of the sublime, the thinking of the sublime has nevertheless proved an unavoidable point of departure for questioning the scheme of form in art. This is visible especially in Jean-François Lyotard's philosophy. For Lyotard, the sublime stands for a "negative aesthetics."[75] The core of his analysis is the failure of presentation inherent in the experience of the sublime, something that also appears, for example, in Nancy, but less so in Derrida.

The sublime offers a ground for thinking art as original formlessness rather than being a composition of the conceptual and the sensuous elements. The notion of the sublime appears in *The Truth in Painting* in the context of *parergon* and the limitless. The presence of a limit is what gives form to the beautiful; according to Derrida, the sublime, by contrast, is to be found in an "object without form" and the "without-limit" is "represented" in it or on the occasion of it, and yet gives the totality of the without-limit to be *thought*.[76] Thus, the beautiful seems to present an indeterminate concept of the understanding, while the sublime presents an indeterminate concept of reason. The sublime is announced in raw nature rather than in art—it is a measure of the "violent incommensurability" between understanding and imagination.[77] In this "unmeasured," attraction and repulsion are merged.

If the experience of beauty presents us with the form of the beautiful which, however, is not based on the concepts of understanding, the Kantian notion of sublime works in an inverse manner. The sublime is a contradictory feeling, when our imagination is unable to present the object given by understanding. This can happen in the case when the object is either too great in size or too powerful for the imagination—examples of this are an Egyptian pyramid or the rage of an ocean. In such a situation, a rupture emerges in the functioning of the subjective faculties when the object of experience momentarily exceeds our abilities of reception in front of some phenomenon.

Thus, for Kant, beauty "is connected with the form of the object" and has "boundaries," whereas the sublime "is to be found in a formless object," which is represented by a "boundlessness."[78] The subject encounters something unpresentable, when the sensuous matter, given in the experience, cannot be received by our concepts—that is, it cannot be given a form. The result is a conflictual feeling in which pleasure and displeasure are merged, and no form for the experience can be presented.

For Derrida, art does not follow a form but is instead an event of difference. His questions include whether it is possible to name such an event—or does art always arrive and depart as a shock, leaving us out of words? The event strikes us by its materiality, but as soon as art appears in its sensuous immediacy, it calls forth concepts.

On a similar basis, the notion of the artistic form has been problematized by Georges Bataille. The "event" refers here to the realm of experience that transgresses ideal meanings or stable philosophical discourses, notions of transgression which figure in both Bataille's and Derrida's thinking. Like Bataille, Derrida states that our encounter with art is concerned with what cannot be made a figure of and thus remains outside of the sphere of representation: they find of importance that which overflows our conceptual grasp of things and thus defines the ground of any meaning as unstable, even groundless. In considering this excess, art holds a particular position. Bataille sets himself to explore how to describe especially the nature of the impulse, the surprise, and even the scandalous effects of art: how art's event-like character—materiality and figureless being—arises. More than as objects, art presents itself as an event: as instances of action and movement. Yet Bataille's and Derrida's viewpoints differ in the way they describe art's materiality, as it appears to us as something that goes beyond every form or concept. Bataille seeks the fundamentally nonlinguistic way to describe the "formless" power of art, while Derrida's philosophy implies the notion of writing and the inherent *différance*, the productive origin of things beyond rational representations.

For Bataille, every work of art is an unpresentable whole and belongs to the sphere of the formless (*informe*). The formless means opposition to form and thus disappears from our conceptual approach to the world. "Formless" is what characterizes art: as he explains in the text "Formless" (1929), formless "serves to bring things down in the world," and it provides a response to the scientific requirement that each thing should have its form and that "the universe would have to take shape."[79] Formless affirms that the universe "resembles nothing" and is only "the unexhibitable monstrosity of the whole."[80] In this context, Bataille refers to such phenomena as spider, spit, and laughter, as well as other kinds of outbursts. He presents the sensuous, formless "base matter," *le bas matérialisme*, as the originary force that precedes all differentiations between matter and form.

In his analyses, Derrida has approached the question of similar dynamic in art. Yet, there are some important distinctions to be made. Bataille presents the sensuous "base matter" as the originary force that precedes all differentiations between matter and form. Derrida addresses the element of formlessness from a perspective in which the production of difference comes to the fore more than in Bataille's analysis. Yet, with his concept of writing Derrida strives to give a name to an operation that surpasses any form of representation, or, in general, the mimetic faculty, thus exceeding every existing figure of thought. Writing is not conditioned by any stable meaning itself: it remains beyond signification, for it comprises all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is written or not. With "writing," Derrida points to the way

in which meanings come about in the process of infinite referral and of never arriving at meaning itself. Thus, every meaning originates from repetition, that is, from the process of the birth of meanings themselves. Such process of perpetual postponement of meaning is also part of his view on the visual images: both writing and visual depiction are organized around a constitutive absence and inappearance instead of presence, whereby the object or the thing itself always escapes.[81]

The formless is bound to get things out of order and to bring about taxonomic disorder (*déclasser*) in the classifications of the world. Ultimately, the formless is nothing as such, since it is neither a concept nor a subject matter or a theme. The existence of the formless is only operational: it is a performative, and exists primarily as an event.[82] In the first place, the formless puts into serious doubt the unity of the form of the work of art.

NOTES

1. In Plato's *Parmenides* (129b–c), Socrates states: "Nor, again, if a person were to show that all is one by partaking of one, and at the same time many by partaking of many, would that be very astonishing. But if he were to show me that the absolute one was many, or the absolute many one, I should be truly amazed."
2. See Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, 157–158.
3. Plato, *Phaedo*, esp. 78a–80e; *Republic*, 595a–614b.
4. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 60f.
5. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VII, 3, 1029a30; VII, 6, 1035b14.
6. Aristotle, *Physics*, I, 9, 192a25–192a34.
7. Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 1, 193a30–193a31.
8. Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 1, 193a32–193b6.
9. Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, 158.
10. Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, 155; cf. George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is There Anything* in *What We Say?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), 121ff. (French translation, 267, cit. Didi-Huberman.)
11. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1960/1965), in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (London: Harper & Row, 1982).
12. Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 9.
13. See Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, the Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014), 268.
14. Formalist criteria for art were launched in the 1920s and 1930s. Regarding their development, of importance was the British philosopher Clive Bell's book *Art* (1914), in which he puts forward the claim that there is a unique aesthetic emotion. The aesthetic qualities in an art object are qualities that evoke this emotion. In the

visual arts, what arouses this emotion is certain "forms and relations of forms," including line and color. This is which Bell calls "significant form." His notion of "significant form" later gave rise to the criteria of formalism in art. Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914).

15. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004).

16. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry," trans. W. A. Steel, in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 25–129 ("Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie," 1766).

17. Robert B. Pippin, "What Was Abstract Art? (From the Point of View of Hegel)," *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 1 (Autumn 2002): 1.

18. Rudolph Arnhem, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

19. Hegel, *Aesthetics I*, 70.

20. Hegel, *Aesthetics I*, 42–43, 45–46.

21. Hegel, *Aesthetics I*, 38.

22. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), trans. James C. Meredith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1952), §§ 41–42.

23. Some proponents of formalism, however, have not meant to underline only the artifact in emphasizing form, but the perceptible form or design of the artifact. The word "design" refers here to the formal relations between the components of the appearance of the work; this conception can be found in Kant.

24. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe calls this process "originary mimesis" (*mimesis originaire*), that is discussed further in chapter 6. See Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*: *Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998).

25. Andrea Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent: Derrida, Heidegger et l'in-origine de l'œuvre d'art," in *Derrida et la question de l'art*, ed. Adnen Jdey (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2011), 304.

26. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 6.

27. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 62 (*La voix et le phénomène*, 69).

28. Art philosopher Monroe C. Beardsley, one of the best-known theorists of analytic aesthetics, holds the evaluative properties of works of art to be unity, complexity, and intensity. The same values apply to the aesthetic experience of the object, although the object is not directly reducible to the experience. Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 83. The union of form and content is visible also in phenomenological thinkers, for example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir.

29. Michel Gaillot, "Théorie esthétique et critique déconstructive," in *La pensée comme expérience: esthétique et déconstruction*, eds. Vangelis Athanassopoulos and Marc Jimenez (Paris: La Sorbonne, 2016), 79.

30. As Michel Gaillot proposes, for Derrida, the function of art is not to "act politically" by resisting society or the culture of the spectacle. Gaillot probably refers here to Guy Debord's idea of a modern society in which authentic social life has been

replaced with its representation and social relations are mediated with images. In such society, the situationist techniques of *détournement* should disrupt and thus resist the flow of the images and the spectacle. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1994), theses 1 and 4.

31. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 21–22, cf. 1 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 26, cf. 5).

32. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 22 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 26).

33. Derrida discusses the question of materiality especially in *The Truth in Painting*, 285–292 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 325–334) in the context of the question of the ground of painting. See also Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 242–255 ("Les 'dessous' de la peinture, de l'écriture et du dessin"), and Derrida's essays on Antonin Artaud's drawings.

34. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 54–55 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 58–59).

35. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 184–186.

36. See Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 55 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 59).

37. For example, Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Plaisir au dessin* (Paris: Galilée, 2009), esp. 122–124.

38. Nancy, *Le Plaisir au dessin*, 122.

39. Nancy, *Le Plaisir au dessin*, 19.

40. Nancy, *Le Plaisir au dessin*, 124.

41. This self-modelling form appears in F. W. J. Schelling and Hegel. Cf. F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 225tm (*Gesammelte Werke* 3, 620). See also, Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, ed. and trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989: *On the Possibility of an Absolute Form of Philosophy*, 1794; orig. *Über die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt*). In Hegel's *Science of Logic* (1816), "form" appears as one of the basic constituents of reality together with matter, essence, content, relation, and condition. For Hegel, the form of phenomena is necessarily related with their content. Phenomena form a totality, and they are wholly contained in their self-relatedness. Thus, the self-relation of the phenomenon is completely specified, if it has the *form* in itself. As a result, the form is identical with content, content being the unity of form and determinate matter. Content is what we perceive, whereas matter itself cannot be seen (*Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller, London: Allen & Unwin, 1969, § 133: Content and Form.) In the chapter concerning the concept of "Ground" in *Logic*, Hegel affirms that form is the focal point of "absolute ground"; form is the "complete whole of reflection" (§§ 1033–1035).

42. Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent," 304.

43. Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent," 304.

44. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 12–13, 24 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 13–14, 25 ("La différance").

45. Gaillot, "Théorie esthétique et critique deconstructive," 81–82.

46. Nancy, *The Muses*, 1–3 (*Les Muses*, 11–13); *The Sense of the World*, 123–139 (*Le sens du monde*, 189–212).

47. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 211 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 313–314).

48. Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, 157.

49. Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, 157–158.

50. This is the case in Kant's aesthetic system that Derrida deconstructs in the essays "Parergon" in *The Truth in Painting* and "Economimesis" (1975).

51. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 9, 5: 217–219; 102–104.

52. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 8, 5: 216.

53. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 26–27; Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 1–13 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 5–18).

54. Meyer Schapiro, "The Still Life as a Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh" (1968), reprinted in, for example, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 427–431. Derrida's "Restitutions" and the debate between Schapiro and Heidegger will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

55. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 257–266 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 293–303).

56. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 312f (*La Vérité en peinture*, 356f).

57. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 27.

58. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 28–29.

59. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 19.

60. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 31.

61. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 25–28. The idea of art as reproduction and likeness is grounded in the distinction between matter (*hyle*) and form (*morphē*) in Plato's philosophy. The distinction of form and matter is, to Heidegger, "*the conceptual schema which is used, in the greatest variety of ways, quite generally for all art theory and aesthetics*." Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 27. Italics in the original.

62. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 35.

63. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 44.

64. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 39.

65. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 33. In effect, the peasant shoes do not *present* anything, but they are rather a visual realization of an equipment that opens a sphere of life by showing the equipmental quality of equipment, its truth as reliability. However, Heidegger does not explain directly what the painting's particular means are in doing this.

66. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 6.

67. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone, 1981), 168 (*La dissémination*, Paris: Seuil, 1972, 195).

68. For Derrida's analyses of Deblé and Atlan, see chapter 4 of this book.

69. Mihai Spariosu, "Mimesis and Contemporary French Theory," in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: An Interdisciplinary Approach. Volume 1: The Literary and Philosophical Debate*, ed. Mihai Spariosu (Philadelphia and Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1984), 70.

70. Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, 157.

71. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 11 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 12).

72. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 8 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 8). For "trace," see Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 13–14, 24–25 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 13–14, 25; "La différence"); cf. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 65–67 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 76–78, "Ousia et grammè").

73. Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, 157.

74. Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, 157–158.

75. Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994), 55; Lyotard, *The Inhuman* (1988), trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991), 135–143 ("After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics"; *L'Inhumain*, Paris: Galilée, 1988); Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 79 ("Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?").

76. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 127 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 145–146).

77. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 129–130 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 147–148); Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 27.

78. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 23.

79. Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl, trans. Allan Stoekl, Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 31.

80. See Denis Hollier, "The Use-Value of the Impossible," trans. Liesl Ollman, *October* 60 (Spring 1992): 17.

81. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 104 (*La Voix et le phénomène*, 117).

82. Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 18; Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone, 1998), 15 (orig. *L'Informe: mode d'emploi*, Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1996).

Chapter 3

The Frames of the Work of Art

In Jacques Derrida's philosophy, the work of art is, without doubt, an ambiguous theme. Although the concept of the "work" is present in most of his philosophy of art, he does not strive to give any encompassing definition to the work of art. Although the "work of art" is among the most researched concepts in philosophies of art and aesthetics of the twentieth century, it is evident that Derrida's theory differs from their aims in fundamental respects.[1]

First, unlike several other philosophical explications, Derrida's analyses of the work of art are not intended to define the positive essence of either the concept of "art" or the "work": no definition can function without the idea of delimitation, and limiting the scope of the work of art is not Derrida's aim. As he brings out in *The Truth in Painting*, all philosophical discourse on art has required a distinction between internal meaning and the circumstances in which the work of art finds itself, or between what is "intrinsic" to the work and what is "extrinsic." Thus understood, aesthetics would always be about the limit between the inside and the outside of the art-object, and hence it always presents itself a discourse on the frame.[2] To make a distinction between the intrinsic and the extrinsic entails further issues: such as what is "proper" to an interpretation and what is a "proper" interpretation—how to describe the location and status of the critical act? These questions are among those that Derrida does *not* seek to answer directly.

Secondly, as Derrida argues, his intention is not to "make sense" of art or to write "about" art (*sur* or *de l'art*), either.[3] This would be a futile effort, since his ideas on art and philosophy are based upon the claim that their fields are destined to remain irreducibly separate—art is always beyond pure meanings and never possesses the transparency of science. Yet, despite their separateness, art and philosophy do not stop appealing to each other, and they even seem to require one another in order to exist. Indeed, contact and contagion

are possible only because they are disparate. Thirdly, Derrida's account of art does not belong to the realm of phenomenology, since art exceeds what is present to us in experience.

According to Derrida's most decisive argument, rather than ever being pure perception, the experience of art is textual from the beginning: even before the execution of any work, art is always already inscribed in the structures that produce meaning in a culture. As a fourth point, on such basis, he develops a theory of art in which the categories of the subjective and the objective, presence and absence, and conceptual and nonconceptual are inseparable. Associated with such distinctions, Derrida attempts to reach beyond the hierarchy of form in art. In his analyses of art, form represents the invariant, the full, originary inner meaning, and content or the multiplicity of external variations that corresponds with the distinction between form and content.[4] By contrast, in conventional formalistic accounts of art, the differentiation of form and content is essential: the form and style, or the purely visual and material aspects of the work of art, appear external to its content, meaning, or social and historical context. Making such differentiation is not part of Derrida's discussion of art, where form and content rather intertwine. Therefore, the aims of his theory cannot be called formalistic, although philosophy always settles upon words, the form of things.

With his inquiry into art, Derrida undertakes to deconstruct the implications of the relation between art and philosophy since Plato. Derrida's primary duty is to examine critically the position of the work of art as an object and the overall possibility of "speaking of art"; the dominance of the eye and vision in the discourses of art; the meaning of truth in art; philosophy's right of seizing the work of art and conversely, art's ability to produce a specific discourse. The task of disclosing the underlying preconceptions that form the tradition of art and philosophy may have a broader meaning: as Jean-Luc Nancy has pointed out, this endeavor is a deconstruction of Derrida's—and perhaps any philosopher's—position in front of the work of art.[5] What happens when Derrida declines to conceive of the work of art as neither an object of research nor as a coherent *œuvre* or a subject that would unfold itself to the spectator in perception? I shall explore his claim, associated with the previous questions, that writing "about" (*de*) or "of" (*sur*) the work would say too much. Namely, as Derrida holds, thinking is always forced to merely "turn around" (*tourner autour*) the work by means of words which deconstruct the discourses that mark the limits of the work.[6]

Being dependent on conceptual analysis, the deconstruction of the work of art leaves us at the limit of what borders the discourse of art and the work of art. In Derrida, this situation results in the inquiry about the language around artworks: if we wish to approach the work of art, how can we do this in the language of philosophy? To be examined is the relation of art and

philosophical thinking: is it finally an attempt to compare the comparable with the incomparable by bringing together two incommensurable spheres of being?[7] Is art—a realm of irreducible manifold and differences—finally impenetrable by concepts and therefore the impossible for philosophy? Nevertheless, the inquiry into art and language is encountered immediately by the inadequacy of words: with respect to the work of art, they invariably prove either too much or deficient. What does it mean to say that, because of the gap between the experience of art and theory, the task of philosophy is to write beginning from the margins of the work?[8] Further, is it possible to perceive an impossibility in drawing the line between the context and art "itself"? To Derrida, drawing the line between context and the work becomes an endless task.

THE WORK OF ART: LIMITING THE UNLIMITED

The question of the identity of the work of art arises unless the work is identified simply with the habitual classification of objects that includes drawing, print, sculpture, painting, installation, film, play, musical composition, or a combination of these. In Derrida, the question of the work touches upon limiting or defining the concept of the work of art. Instead of delimiting the work, his inquiry about the work leads to the questioning of the limits, which appear to be unstable and open.

In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida examines what is interior and exterior to concepts and their systems, or what is part of them and what is not. Despite their solid, universal appearance, all philosophical systems finally prove to be fragile: one may always find cases that do not fit into a given conceptual structure.

According to Derrida's central assertion, the conceptual object, such as the work of art, never has a clear-cut *frame* that would determine and define things to the end and produce them as each other's opposites. Namely, how to define a concept, such as "art," if there is no return to its opposition? In Derrida's view, the "truth" of the work therefore proves unstable, for the reason that it is pronounced always in a certain theoretical discourse. Its limits, as well as the condition of possibility of a theory of art, are both in the focus of Derrida's questioning. He inquires how to describe the influence that theory and art have on each other, while they do not determine each other. Instead of philosophical universality suggested by Hegel among others, what we call a "work of art" or, for example, a "painting," always lacks something in relation to its concept, being either too much or too little in comparison to it. In Derrida, art is characterized rather by its radical, inimitable singularity from the beginning. This notion corresponds to the phenomena of contemporary art

and the practices of avant-garde, in which novel inventions and the breaking of earlier rules appears as a norm.

As suggested in the first chapter of this book, Derrida's interest in art is aimed at and even originates from the relation between language and art. This interest is grounded not in how art could be translated into the language of philosophy but in the difference between them—in fact, their irreducible separation. If the aim of propositional language is to tell the truth understood as correspondence between language and things, art has another purpose: it *shows* itself and "exposes the exposition" of the work, or what is taking place in the work.[9] What Derrida recurrently points out in *The Truth in Painting* is that the act of showing is, as such, outside any discourse on logical truth. Therefore, there are reasons to ask how to phrase what is exposed to us in the work; is there anything to be called truth about it?

Reason and the senses are always outside one another, but they touch upon each other's domains. In Derrida's opinion, it is therefore necessary to investigate how the relation to the outside or to the other is constituted in art.[10] If words fail to express what art shows to us, language cannot be used to rationally account for the difference between language and art, nor is it able to express the difference between the *traits* belonging to a work of art. If philosophy and art are accordingly destined to be outside of each other, what does it mean that they paradoxically are forced to remain in touch with each other? If they were not, the abyss that separates them would not remain as a difference but would be transferred into rational discourse and into the sphere of "the same," into knowledge, for example. To justify this view, Derrida declares that any discourse on painting, either philosophical or poetic, appears to him as "silly," for it either tries to achieve a mastery over painting or turns out as unproductive with respect to what goes beyond language concerning painting.[11]

However, the inconsistency and discordance is what to Derrida's mind keeps art and language together. What the difference between art and philosophy can mean, then: is their difference the very "thing" that, in the end, becomes a work?[12] For instance, when discussing Valerio Adami's drawings, Derrida states that what remains "disarticulated, dissociated, dislocated," exhibits itself by withdrawing, as its "now"-moment can never be attained as such.[13] Keeping in mind the ubiquity of the themes of difference and the dislocation of meaning it implies, a particular objective of this study is to explore the scope of the very act of differing, the *différance*, and its implications in the face of art. How and when does difference become a work, and on what conditions it is possible to call it a "work," if any? What are the preconditions of "work," and what does its deconstruction mean in Derrida's hands, if the work's site is neither the object, its aesthetic experience nor any theory concerning it, but rather the abysmal tension between thinking and the senses and the limits of the work that appear to be subject to continuous displacement?

The question of the frame is linked organically to the problem of how it is possible to speak of the work of art philosophically. For Derrida, the deconstruction of the work of art takes place at the crossing of the material work and the meanings and contexts attached to it; the work is the site where the limited and the unlimited, the finite and the infinite intersect. To speak of the essentially impossible coexistence of these realms, Derrida's solution is to produce philosophical language that is irreducible to argumentative style, a language that is inseparable of its objects—the works of art. Such language is aimed at producing an affect in the reader in a way that is comparable to the influence of works of art, among which painting holds a particular place.

Beginning from these assumptions, the present chapter approaches the framework of Derrida's philosophical insight into what constitutes the work of art. In *The Truth in Painting*, two interrelated questions arise. First, how is it possible to approach verbally the "work of art"? As stated above, the inconsistency of language and art appears fundamental to Derrida: while language is a discursive practice, artistic expression is nonverbal. Yet, despite the distinction, they appear to require each other to exist as separate spheres.[14] The demand set to philosophy is to speak of art, not by appropriating it, but by letting art "call" for words. The second question concerns the possibilities to speak of the work of art among the phenomena of the world, while not limiting art or the work to suit to any predetermined certain conceptual pattern. This involves the awareness that the discourse on art is related always to the language used on art.[15]

As it appears, Derrida's philosophy of the work of art concerns finally the doubt and even impossibility of making philosophy of the work. Despite his doubt about the possibility of language to speak *of* art, Derrida's vocabulary used in examining art and its discourses is influenced thoroughly by his analysis of language and literature, assuming that both language and art appear as varieties of text and writing. His main argument concerns the impossibility of discerning the work, of distinguishing its inside and outside the work of art is never merely seen "as it is," according to its inner discourse, but is constantly affected by its outside, the context.

Instead of speaking of art philosophically, Derrida states that he is writing *around* painting. What does writing around painting mean, then? He describes this task as an attempt to trace, not the work "itself," but the frame, *parergon*. The frame allows the place for the work, which surrounds the work, *ergon*.[16] By referring to what lies outside of the work instead of speaking "of" the work, Derrida's analysis implicates that it is possible to overcome the philosophical systems of art or aesthetics presented by Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger.[17] What does this statement imply, if we suppose that philosophy has its restrictions and is unable to speak "about" art, and yet discourse on art is the only possibility of conceptualizing it?

Because language is external to art, language may touch, at the most, the boundaries that surround art. As a result, the boundaries between art and language show to be mobile in Derrida: the meanings of words remain beyond all signification in the traces and their "shadows."[18] How do such traces form the proliferating frames of the works, frames that themselves are also instances of what Derrida means by "writing"?

In addition to analyzing the deficiencies of the philosophical language in front of art, the theme of the "overcoming of aesthetics" is an object of deconstruction in Derrida's thinking.[19] The overcoming of earlier aesthetics largely offers a framework for his operations in questioning the tradition of philosophy of art. The aims of this endeavor are connected at many essential points with Martin Heidegger's disinterest and even distrust in traditional aesthetics.[20] In its focus on subjectivity, according to Heidegger modern aesthetics obscures the essence of art as that of the disclosure of truth. At the same time, he claims, art is ontologically deficient because of this obstruction. Derrida's view is comparable to Heidegger's: as Derrida draws his attention to the conditions and contextuality of art and its experience, it is evident that the aesthetic experience understood from the subjective perspective is not the center of his interests either. Rather, it provides a target of both explicit and implicit criticism.

Apart from reflecting the Heideggerian origins of subjectivity and how the work differs from other objects of knowledge, Derrida refuses to adopt two other approaches to traditional aesthetics: the aesthetics of the sublime and the idea of positive aesthetics.[21] The model provided by the Kantian aesthetics of the sublime brings with it "negative aesthetics," or the presentation of the unpresentable.[22] The exploration of the unpresentable forms an essential part of Jean-François Lyotard's, Jean-Luc Nancy's, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophy, but less so in Derrida. The refusal of positive aesthetics, in turn, amounts to the thinking of art in the various registers of the incalculable and the undefinable. However, it seems possible to think that apart from the aesthetics of the sublime, a kind of negative aesthetic belongs to Derrida's thought, as he puts into doubt the mimetic principle that the "thing itself" could be presented. In the place of mimetic reproduction, he brings the idea of the constitutive invisibility of art. In its widest scope, Derrida's writing is about the possibilities of philosophy of art.

Instead of an "aesthetic" inquiry, the contexts of painting and limits of its discourses form the primary object of philosophical inquiry concerning art in Derrida. In this, not only the philosophical background but also the modernist theories of art offer a background against which his approach may be examined. In modernism, the autonomous value of the work of art was the key to understanding it, whereas in Derrida's account the margins of the work of art undoubtedly hold a more important position. Clement Greenberg,

one of the best-known writers on modernist art, appreciates a work of art for the medium-specific features that distinguish it from other arts and genres; flatness and two-dimensionality are what make painting stand out in comparison with sculpture.[23] However, after the invention of "new" art forms such as installations and performances in the 1960s, it has become increasingly complicated to tell what belongs to the essence of a specific art form and what does not. The media and techniques of visual arts have expanded to unprecedented areas and means of expression, as is shown by the development of installation art, media art, and works combining different media and materials. In these, diversity and limitlessness have become a rule.[24] After the criteria for defining each art have become more complex than before, earlier practices have shown to be insufficient to account for art from the purely formalistic, technical, or material point of view. The discussion on "art" and the nature of the "work of art" has shifted, so that it may be solved by criticism and philosophy. In philosophical terms, determining the work of art appears to be an indefinite task in the present situation where this notion has become diversified, to the degree that it has lost its alleged former unity.

Among the different arts, Derrida's analyses of painting allow the interpretation that, besides the needs of philosophy and deconstructionist theory in specific, he responds to the practical situation and the changes in the conceptions of art and the work of art. With new and more variable artistic practices shown, it has become questionable whether there is any interior coherence to what is termed a "work of art." If no general concepts suffice to account for what art is, this means that art is relentlessly only coming to its limits and seeking them against everything else that is part of a culture: to use Derrida's vocabulary, any *trait* in art is never common, not even one; instead, its divisibility "founds text, traces and remains."[25] In another register, one can say that the visible in art escapes the authority of the truth.[26] Escaping the truth is something that philosophy should not do, at least if philosophy is conceived of as the "intellectual light." For Derrida the truth proposed by the metaphysical tradition refers to the idea that terms and sentences would match facts and properties or that sensory things would be translated into concepts. Truth would then correspond to transferring meanings understood as trans-linguistic entities, and this process would be controlled by meanings that transcend language.[27]

A possibility to bring together the language of philosophy and the nonconceptual effect of art lies in the working of the metaphor. As Derrida claims in "White Mythology," philosophy, like perhaps all language, is founded on a metaphor. Its concept suggests that meanings are distinct from their material bearers. Metaphor is therefore not only in the *text* of philosophy, but it seems to involve the usage of philosophical language in its entirety.[28] According to Derrida's insight, explanatory concepts used in philosophical language are

figures themselves, like the metaphors of light and clarity that are customarily associated with truth. In the way of metaphors, philosophical terms are non-literal and have no grounding supplied for them.[29] This is to say that Derrida questions the notion that metaphors would be "ornaments" for truth, as the unusual or even disturbing way of employing language is typical of philosophical concepts. It follows that the metaphysical distinction and hierarchy between the literal and the metaphorical become questionable. From one perspective, Derrida's notion of metaphor corresponds to the question of style that he has discovered to be essential to Nietzsche's philosophy. Style can thus be said to concern "the weight or *examen* of some pointed object"—it is to say that it is not merely an additional feature to Nietzsche's thinking, but his philosophical thinking is structured by the style of writing.[30]

The breach between the discursive truth and art is especially striking in the contemporary situation, where most artistic practices have become more varied than before; it seems increasingly complicated and even purposeless to tell what art and the work of art "are." This development is reflected by Derrida's writings, in which the attempt to name the essence of art proves difficult and unnecessary, even impossible, from the perspective of the ontology of art.[31] That limitation and unlimitedness of the work of art is at stake in his inquiry does not mean, however, that what he refers to as the "work" would be without content as such. Rather, he takes an interest in the mobility and proliferation of the context or the frame of the work. The displacement of the frame takes place in overlapping theoretical discourses of art. This makes the work of art an object of philosophical research. Thus, language and image are inseparable in his thinking.[32]

Derrida's philosophy implies the notions of writing and the inherent *différance*, the productive origin of things beyond rational representations. In analyzing art also, he begins from the thought that art cannot be limited to one single conceptual origin or philosophical abstractions and taxonomies, since art is a contextual and cultural practice. As such, he maintains, it may not have any "true" essence outside history; art gathers and disperses itself at every moment. The analysis of Gérard Titus-Carmel's drawings in Derrida's essay "Cartouches" offers an example of this movement where art's identity is displaced in the experimentation, in which different media such as painting, installation, and sculpture are brought together. In defining the "work of art" at stake is a logic of *différence* and *mise en abyme*, of *traits* that are divided all the time—in the same manner, the "truth" of what is a work of art eludes one's grasp. Its truth is movable for the reason that the *ergon* is framed by the *parergon*, and they are dependent on each other. However, as Derrida claims, it is impossible to frame the context.

The post-phenomenological and deconstructionist thinking resonates with the practices of contemporary art, especially what is called avant-garde art:

art that questions earlier conventions and forms of art. In their work, artists have taken up new methods and art has entered unforeseen areas and started employing new means of expression. Notably, it has approached the sphere of everyday life and ordinary, mundane objects. Compared to modernist art and its recognizable aesthetic practices—like in painting, two-dimensionality, and the framed form—art has after modernism turned increasingly "anti-aesthetic," since they may not be recognized as works of art on any "aesthetic" grounds. This notion has led to innumerable discussions of the "end of art." As it is often asserted, since Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) and the tradition of using ready-made objects or things that do not differ from regular, everyday things on a sensory basis, art has become more a question of thinking and of definition and framing than seeing. Duchamp is quoted as the artist who crystallized the idea that art makes an argument of itself by means of showing itself, not by representing things on the visible surface of the work of art. Ready-mades put into question the very concept of art by detaching from ways of presentation that have been understood to belong uniquely to art, in a way that art comes more alike the idea of the truth of art. It thus finds itself closer to language and philosophy.[33]

The situation from which Derrida's thinking of art emerges not only is located in specific philosophical surroundings but also motivated by the turning point between practices in art. That is, Derrida's thinking concerning art and the aesthetic takes place in a point of rupture within both philosophy and art. The emergence of new kinds of theories after modernism, especially from the 1960s onwards, is connected with the changing practices of art. In modernist theories of art, the work of art was identified most often with an artifact, an object made by the artist. The idea of the art-object gradually transformed with the birth of new forms of art, especially site-specific, process-like, and event-based art in which the work changed or disappeared and therefore did not necessarily leave a concrete artifact behind. Both the conditions for the context and reception of the work of art became important after the prime of modernism. At that time, art and its philosophies alike began to highlight the fact that what is referred to by the "work of art" is a matter of convention rather than dependent on anything that might be called the transcendent, permanent essence of the work of art. This development can be seen also in the wider context of twentieth-century theories of art, in which the identity of the work has been interrogated: is the work of art to be identified rather with the object or its subjective aesthetic experience?

Despite his questioning of the status of the "work" in art, Derrida continues the tradition begun by the Romantic philosophy in proposing that art is equal to philosophy: they both are able to express truths of their own, but by strategies that differ from each other. This is due to art's materiality. Derrida's theories of art do not, then, rely on artistic creation as an intelligible idea and

an outcome of theoretical interests in the way promoted by conceptual art and groups like Art & Language.

What kind of writing about art is possible, to begin with? As Derrida suggests in *Memoirs of the Blind*, art belongs rather to the realm of the invisible than the visible, or at least the visible and the invisible are indistinguishable. The relation between seeing and invisibility is one of the key problems in Derrida's account of art. Because the relation presents itself as an interruption and an abyss, it means at once regression and difference between the two sides. On this ground, Derrida argues that art does not lend itself to be studied from the viewpoint of truth—still less if truth is understood in terms of the Cartesian "clear seeing" and metaphors associated with light: *theoria* and idea in Aristotle, the "clear and distinct perception" in Descartes, presence and eternal forms.[34] According to Derrida's wider claim, speaking of art is filled with pitfalls: in speaking of art philosophically, one can have no recourse to the vocabulary of positive, empirical knowledge about works of art. This means to acknowledge that it is impossible to give, by means of thinking, a figure to art that, in the singularity of its instances, fundamentally remains beyond any figure. Art is thus the non-place of expression in the sense that its expression exists only as traces, which are, as such, absent and stay without the reach of the visible.[35] If there are any figures involved in art, they are born at the limit of defiguration only.

The point of departure for Derrida's philosophy of the work of art is the thinking of the work without work. What does the impossibility of speaking of a totality of work mean, if speaking *of* art proves impossible, to begin with? What does the idea of writing *around* art imply? In front of such questions, two problems arise: how to deal with art and its works with words, if philosophy must remain separate from them and yet answer to the "call" of art, its need for words?[36] Is there any means of limiting the work of art among the phenomena of the world, if speaking around art leads to considering the language and thinking used of art? These questions form the background of the impossibility that Derrida takes as the point of departure in exploring the work of art: the fundamental difficulty of capturing the work and its frame.

ART AND THE TRACES OF WRITING

The common ground for the operations of deconstruction is that the forms of art are related always already to writing, a system of traces and of *grammē*.[37] In language, Derrida claims, there is not first an oral language and then a written copy of it. In a similar vein, he does not suppose that visual art would create hierarchies, either between the "real" object and its representation, or between the different arts. Like language, works of art engender new forms,

uses of language, and mental images, which makes art writing that consists of discrete elements. Beginning from this assumption, Derrida directs his attention to the operations of art and their deconstruction that seems to revolve around what is impossible to be explicated. It is certainly less important to answer how one might "deconstruct" art itself, or whether such a project is possible at all. Derrida's attitude toward the complex relation of language and art is, perhaps, similar to that of Jean-François Lyotard, for whom the impossibility of translating the experience is a mutual concern between language and nonlanguage.[38]

A first look will be taken here at the philosophical theme of the work of art from the perspective of its limits. As suggested above, the theme of the limits of art refers in the first place to the possibility of defining the "work of art." This question will be approached from the viewpoint of the frame and the *parergon*, key terms in *The Truth in Painting*. The frame refers to both the conceptual limits imposed on the notion of art, and to the more concrete boundaries of each work and its singular materiality, medium, and technique.

In exploring deconstructive thinking's ability to speak about the work of art, the relation between particularity and generality becomes manifest from a special standpoint. To be exact, what does Derrida's deconstruction of the work of art refer to? Does it apply to the reconsideration of a number of philosophical notions and approaches of art, such as mimesis, the figure, the truth, or the very idea of the work of art—that is to say, the *language* that conditions our conceptions of art? Or rather, is the object of deconstruction the relation between art and philosophy? Obviously, as stated above, the works themselves are not the object of deconstruction as concrete artifacts. A partial answer may be discovered in Derrida's interest in the deconstruction of the truth of the work of art: "Truth spoken *in painting*? Or truth spoken *about* painting?"[39] In question would be thus the double conception of truth in art: the truth that appears in the work of art and the literal, philosophical truth that emerges on the grounds of what one writes about the work.

For Derrida, the materiality of the work of art proves to be impenetrable by any kind of linguistic expression. Therefore, the difference between an ideal, invariant image and the contingent variation remains.[40] However, as I suggest in the chapter "The Muteness and Blindness of the Image," the deconstruction of the work of art takes language as its primary point of departure and eventually aims at language, at what is said about the work of art. Yet, what kind of frame is applicable to the discourse of a painting or a drawing, considering, as Derrida does, that any discourse may be limited in innumerous ways, but never in a definite sense? In the same vein, according to the deconstructionist view, the work of art refers immediately to its outside, to its context, which is a supplement to another context. In other words, where to draw the line in deconstructing the language that borders on any work of art?

To attempt to answer the questions above, it appears necessary to think of the relations between art and language: deconstructive writing on art which remains at the limit of thinking and the unthinkable. As a preliminary note, it seems that this kind of writing, evident in both Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, has assumed its models from art itself: from its constitutive undecidability or impossibility that cannot be returned to significations and representations or to the categories of presence and absence.[41] Considering these viewpoints, the deconstructive notion of art both draws on the tradition of phenomenology in emphasizing the way in which it operates in and through the bodily, material existence of artworks *and* differs from the phenomenological accounts remarkably.[42] This is conceivable if we think that deconstruction highlights the presence of the nonsensuous and challenges the hegemony of vision as part of the phenomenological tradition.

In the place of thinking on the identity of things, Derrida has sought ways to approach them rather from the viewpoints of nonidentity, non-essence, and lack of substance, expressed by his notions of *différance*, *pharmakon*, and *khôra*, among others.[43] Rather, the concepts of "art" and "work of art" are open-ended and dependent on the context; in this sense, the mutual inference and reciprocity between art, work of art, and artist that Heidegger suggests in his *Origin of the Work of Art* foreshadows the deconstructionist view.[44] Nevertheless, the current usage of these concepts in a variety of contexts seems to display implicit presuppositions in Derrida's analyses of different art forms and artworks. In the present study, the point of departure is the impossibility of making a theory of what the "work of art" refers to within the tradition of deconstruction; instead, the deconstructionist "work of art" seems to be in need of an analysis. Until now, few attempts exist at approaching it *per se* from the perspective of deconstructive accounts. Therefore, the present research is written to answer a paradoxical question: how to account for the work of art and keep it illimited at the same time?

On these grounds, the object of examination here is the tension between the conceptual approach to the "work" and its different uses, which in the practice of analyzing art often appears to be unproblematic in Derrida's and Nancy's writings. In general, Derrida, among others, proposes that the scope of the "work of art" is too diverse and, at the same time, too abstract to be defined and dependent on its framework and multiple contexts, artistic, social, and philosophical alike, which all contribute to what we see as a painting, drawing or a photograph. In practice, however, the employment of these appellations does not seem to involve any difficulties in speaking of instances of art. This situation necessitates a further inquiry into the conditions upon which the deconstructionist discourse on art takes place. It is one angle of the critique of the signifier and the signified in Derrida's philosophy, as well as Roland Barthes's.[45] According to Barthes, what we call "picture" is neither

a real object nor an imaginary object: the identity of what is "represented" is referred to endlessly, and the signified is hence always displaced.[46] This is because it is only a series of nominations. Yet the infinity of language and the "leakage" it produces is precisely the picture's system, a viewpoint that is shared by Derrida.

The refusal to determine the scope of concepts differentiates poststructuralist theories of art from a number of earlier philosophies of art and aesthetics, in which the conceptual analysis has been the primary objective. These theories generally focus on the substance of concepts, whereas what is central to deconstruction is rather the shift from the thinking of substance to *relations* between concepts and texts. In these, the notion of textuality and the associated themes of spacing and *différance*, or productive difference, come to be considered rather than of a theory of language as such.[47] Derrida's questioning of the work of art is based upon the particular meaning that he gives to the notion of text: according to him, reality is organized as texts. Among these are the phenomena of culture, thought systems, and worldviews. Thus, what we call a work of art forms one kind of specific text, in Derrida's words, a "tissue of differences," inside which any meaning can be born. Each text has several contexts, against which a text can appear as meaningful. For Derrida, the text is a dissimulating structure, which always remains hidden. It can be described as a texture or textile, which possibly takes centuries to unravel, because its compositional rules or intention can never be made present or represented.[48]

Because any work is textual and at once works as a context to other works, Derrida brings out in several occasions that he discusses circles *around* the work of art rather than speaks *of* it: what surrounds the work are its borders, the margin, the frame, the title, and the *parergon*.[49] Thus, as a horizon there is the notion that no final truth about the essence of the work of art reveals itself in different interpretations.[50]

From a specific vantage point, the nature of deconstruction appears as objective: it is committed to things and does not take place apart from their taking place.[51] Although the dominant paradigms of truth do not restrict the deconstructionist notion of objectivity, deconstruction nonetheless inevitably happens in relation to its outside, other patterns of thought and philosophy that precedes it. Nothing takes place apart from language, and therefore linguistic "construction" does not exhaust our engagement with things. As deconstruction extends itself outside the explicitly textual terrain of philosophy and literary criticism, it runs up against what shows itself at the limit of any directly linguistic grasp—color, for example—and so exposes itself in a new way to the materiality of things. Thus, the interaction and dynamics between language and materiality is the focus of thinkers such as Derrida and Nancy: what is language capable of in front of the objects of the world?

The question of the object in and for deconstruction is a question not about *what* the object is, but about *how* or, even more simply, *that* it is—how it does its being.[52] If the task of deconstruction is to reflect upon how to find binary oppositions, reverse their hierarchy and decenter the opposition, it follows that meanings cannot be permanent and secure, but they are already unstable and, to use Derrida's expression, "in ruins."[53] Being in ruins refers to the historical and yet unattainable event at the origin of art, at the origin of drawing the intangible line: the loss of origin, absence of memory, the fragments of memory.[54] The deconstruction of meanings can aim to make this situation explicit, although it can hardly release itself from all it displays and diagnoses.

THE UNIVERSAL AND THE MULTIPLE

The fact that there exists an endless amount of works of art in the world instead of one "Art" has probably been one of the reasons why philosophers have felt the need to appreciate the proliferation of the arts and works of art. Changes in the theoretical climate, such as the critical reading of Hegel in France in the 1960s and the growing interest in Martin Heidegger's philosophy, have raised the question of whether it is possible to speak of "art" or the "work of art" in general terms at all. Among thinkers of deconstruction, Jean-Luc Nancy has taken an interest in art and the arts in their unlimited diversity, while the focus of Derrida's analyses of art is on writing and text, of which works of art are instances and may be characterized as traces.[55]

In a general perspective, the project of deconstruction participates in the task of disengaging with the thought of a unified notion of "art" or the "work of art" and the idea of totality implied in them. Instead of these, philosophers of deconstruction make visible the countless relations that works of art have with the phenomena of the world, other forms of art included. The contexts of production and of existing works of art engender new works and provide them with an intrinsic multiplicity of details inherent in every other work. As especially Jean-Luc Nancy has suggested, that innumerous details are involved in the production of works of art makes art originally technical. As such, art bears a sense of plurality, a fact that is connected essentially with the idea of the sensible plurality of art: the technical scope makes of art a sensible form that engages the intelligible materiality of sense.[56] Thus, at the core of Nancy's idea of art is originary technicity, but it is aimed at dislodging the thinking of the origin of the artwork as it appears in Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art*. In Nancy's view, art opens a world, but the thought of a sensible and technical plurality disperses the notion of an origin. In this sense, the deconstructionist idea of art appears as fundamentally anti-Hegelian.[57]

In view of these considerations, Derrida and Nancy acknowledge that works of art always resist definitions since they exceed any preexisting systems, discourses, or categories. Their thinking reflects the skepticism toward the idea of a totalizing or teleological system of reason in philosophy. This hypothesis was put forward by philosophers of Romanticism, Johann Gottfried von Herder, Friedrich Schlegel among them and also Hegel: from within the realm of critical reason, they attempt to explore a reality whose complex nature cannot be captured by the work of rationality (*Verstandesdenken*).[58] According to Romantic theorists, neither philosophy nor art cannot be subsumed under universal truths. In the writings of Novalis (1772–1801), the fragment questions the idea that philosophical system-building, whether of a deductive or a teleological kind, is able to capture the nature of reality. It can be attained through reason, but unlike Schelling and Hegel, Novalis believes that a notion of reason that takes into account historicity, art, and religious sentiments can only be obtained by leaving behind the idea of a final and all-encompassing philosophical system. In the Romantic theories, the *désœuvrement* of art and philosophy takes place in the form of poetry that is fragmented in itself. *Désœuvrement* or inoperativeness means that no totality of the work is possible, but instead, each work is fragmented and scattered from the beginning. In art, the truth may concern the interpretation of art, artistic value, or the importance of art among all phenomena. Derrida finds fragmentation in Stéphane Mallarmé's poem "Mimique," where everything that is presented is in the act of referral, in the mime, with no correspondence to the preexistent theme and its signification.[59]

In Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's account, this is to say that in its detachment or isolation fragmentation corresponds exactly to completion and totality: the totality of Romantic poetry presents itself as a fragment.[60] However, despite these changes in perspectives, it is evident that art and the work of art continue to be relevant, even autonomous subjects of argumentation and speculation in discussions around deconstructionist thought.[61]

Like other poststructuralist philosophers, Derrida has emphasized the significance of discontinuity instead of a tradition and to highlighting the singularity and anti-essentiality of the work of art. For them, every single work has to be considered in its unique context and as an original, inimitable presentation of its intrinsic truthfulness. As Nancy stresses, what we designate as "art" exists nowhere but in singular works of art: there is no art without the existence of particular works, which, in turn, aim to experiment with the boundaries of art.[62] Every work of art attests to its own singular ability to present itself as it is—in its own aesthetic and material existence, which cannot be reduced to either a supersensible idea or generality that it would be a representation of. Therefore, deconstructive and other poststructuralist accounts of art should be understood as expressly anti-mimetic: each work

possesses its own truth, which does not exist outside of the work, but in its sensuous surface and in the way in which it presents itself singularly in the encounter with the spectator.

On these grounds, one can inquire whether and how it is possible to frame the deconstructive understanding of the work of art. While the notion of art is accepted to be changeable in contents and dependent on its variable contexts, the inherent potential of works of art to be distinctive as independent and distinctive things is still held onto by deconstructionist thinkers. The deconstructionist analyses reveal that the work of art and the realm of the aesthetic deserve an ontological treatise of their own. Hence the potential to come into presence and to frame itself as a work among other phenomena of the world still appears to constitute some conceptual constancy and coherence to the "work of art" in deconstructionist readings. The framing of the work may be either explicit or implicit, and it highlights the importance of the context. Namely, the question of framing concerns the conditions—both conceptual and practical—on which a thing can be recognized and appreciated as a work of art in a certain situation, against a specific background but also on some preconditions. On all occasions, the work of art presents itself as an event, a process, or a constellation in the context from where it emerges and stands out, as Derrida claims in *The Truth in Painting*.

Thus, deconstructionist philosophers inquire what suffices, in a certain environment and situation, for thinking of an object in terms of a work of art. This entails asking how the conditions for observing and treating a thing as an artwork are formed: is there anything that constitutes the conditions for the taking place of the work? In other words, in question is the frame itself, whether it is approached from the point of view of philosophy and theories of art, of the reception and criticism of art, or economy, sociology, and politics, to name but a few possible "frames" of recent and contemporary understanding of art.[63] From this point of view, our examination is directed toward the assumptions that form historically the basis for the understanding of the artwork. This perspective enables a critical questioning of whether it is generally possible to form theories of things such as art and works of art.

In the following parts of this study, I consider what constitutes the notion of the work of art within the tradition of deconstruction and the wider framework of recent theories. This is done with a view to both the deconstructionist assumptions but also against the background of aesthetic theories of the twentieth century, especially those drawing on the tradition of modernism. While a number of recent aesthetic theories have as their goal to delineate what "art" and the "work of art" refer to and to bring clarity to their scope and use, philosophers within the poststructuralist and post-phenomenological tradition have often avoided giving straightforward definitions to these concepts.[64] Rather, works of art appear as fundamentally indefinable entities. Despite its

heterogeneity and lack of continuity in its uses, the concept of the work of art is, however, ubiquitous in the deconstructionist use, and philosophers give various examples of works of art in their essays. To be inquired is now how the deconstructive notion of art is constituted and what in Derrida's examples of art are *about*, if, to quote Geoffrey Bennington's words, "art has always been in excess of its concepts, already deconstructive, and deconstruction the motor or movement or element of art."[65]

HORS-D'ŒUVRE: "A PLACE OUTSIDE OF THE WORK"

Overall, Derrida's inquiry draws on the question of whether there is something that may be said to form the true "work of art" and, correspondingly, whether there is something in it that stands as merely a supplement to the work.[66] In *The Truth in Painting*, a similar structure receives the name of the *hors-d'œuvre*, "a place outside of the work."[67] The remains, the supplement—what is rest of the idea of a work—is the *hors-livre*, "outwork," which is also the literal translation of *hors-d'œuvre*. The expression *hors-d'œuvre* points to accessory, foreign or secondary object, supplement, aside, and remainder; for Derrida, it is that which is external to the work but also acting alongside the work. In other words, the *hors-d'œuvre* is synonymous to the *parergon* in Derrida: both terms refer to what the principal subject must not become, by being separated from itself. The place of the "outwork," however, does not stand simply outside the work but also acts alongside and thus "right up against the work (*ergon*)."[68] Derrida's claim is that philosophical discourse will always have been against the *parergon*, or the frame, for a *parergon* is always an addition to the *ergon* and touches and operates upon the *ergon* as if from outside. Therefore, the *parergon* is neither simply outside nor inside of a work or any kind of discourse: "Like an accessory that one obliged to welcome on the border, on board [*au bord, à bord*]. It is first of all on (the) bo(a)rd(er) [*Il est d'abord l'à-bord*]."[69]

By the term "supplement," Derrida means a remainder left from any figure. Such remainder cannot be fitted into any existing system. Supplement means a "necessary addition" that means a disruption in being's presence to itself and in being's ability to appropriate itself, to make itself its own propriety. Supplementarity is, on the one hand, necessary to being and part of it. On the other hand, the supplement is not part of being but is external to being. The purpose of this idea is to deconstruct the presumed presence of being to itself, which is the basis of metaphysics: being as plenitude, that is, as present to itself, cannot be its own origin or purpose. This is because its fullness is disrupted by the fact that being is based on something external—to difference that causes a fracture in identity.

Because Derrida finds in every system a possibility of instability between the object, the "thing itself" and its outside, he finds it necessary to argue for the remainder. For example, transmitting knowledge entails the sense of reproduction and transformation of meaning also; this is what he calls "dissemination."[70] In the Kantian aesthetic discourse, he perceives it in the element of addition or supplement; in the problematic of the painting, the *hors-d'œuvre* stays on the limit of the discourses of language and of the painted object. It signals the realm of the nonconceptual, where the element of self-presence is destroyed. Shifting the focus from the work to its context, the *hors-d'œuvre*, signifies thus exiting the circle of the production of self-subsisting, self-identical meanings. The "outwork," the context of the work, produces differences rather than an idea of work as a selfsame entity.

In speaking of the "work," Derrida's idea of dissemination is in a key position: it refers to a reflection on the plurality of references and voices in all forms of writing. The plurality becomes visible in the ways that all texts, the work included, contain the possibility of being interpreted in multiple ways: "The space of dissemination does not merely place the plural in effervescence; it shakes up an endless contradiction, marked out by the undecidable syntax of more."[71] More than anything, undoing the work hence means that the work is never one and totalizable. The unavoidable multiplication of texts contributes to Derrida's notion that a "text" and a "work" are not reducible to one another, but the text is rather, in a wider sense, a place of thinking that produces the proliferation of other texts. However, he contrasts the concept of dissemination with polysemy: polysemy, the existence of several meanings, constrains interpretations if the number of the various possible meanings is limited. Dissemination or writing, however, refers to the disengagement of meanings and of the semantic or hermeneutic horizons: as the contexts of meanings are undetermined and therefore unlimited, also meanings may possibly signify a limitless number of things within the text; there is no "real" meaning for a sign. This said, the "text" appears as a site of the effects of opening and closing.[72]

Derrida's discussion of the work's dissemination implies a difference between the goals of structuralism and poststructuralism in thinking of meaning. According to a general structuralist idea, all cultural systems are structured in the same way as language: they have a structure based on mutual differences that produces meaning. The structure functions as if it were a grammar, since texts are systems of signs, which in turn are based on producing differences. Behind the structures there is not necessarily anything other than contracts since structuralist thinkers acknowledge that language itself is based on arbitrary and therefore only contractual symbols. Thus, structuralist views of reality are based on the idea that meanings are organized according to a stable structure or a system, but this principle has been criticized; for

example, that history could be understood as a process with a purpose, a pattern, or a specific reason for development.

Poststructuralism developed as a response to structuralism in the 1960s. The theorists of poststructuralism not only adopted the fundamental ideas of structuralism but also criticized many of them. Especially Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard have drawn attention to the notion that cultural discourses emerge from different social practices and institutions; therefore, they cannot be defined by any "grand narratives." Derrida's aim has been to show, in specific, that there is some confusion and disorder in all structures and that not all features in language, for example, can be anticipated, such as complicated comparisons and metaphors. Instead, language and other systems, like painting or fine arts, are something that is produced constantly: language and art produce new language and works of art. For this reason, Derrida and Jean Baudrillard claim, art can hardly be based on any complete systems, formulas or preexisting codes—according to Baudrillard, one cannot speak about reality any longer because it has been replaced by images.[73] Systems of culture are themselves originally material practices by nature, and not simply reflections of an abstract ideal. What counts for Derrida are the differences that exist within things themselves in various systems.

The fundamental objective in the book *Dissemination* (1972) is to address criticism toward the possibility of the self-presence of the concept and the work, like the "book": whether they can be identical with itself. Therefore, Derrida constantly inquires whether the signified—the abstract, mental concept—and the signifier—the material form—really correspond with each other without any residue and thus form a system. In Derrida's opinion, this is what Hegel suggests, most notably in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807) and *The Science of Logic* (1816). To defend his argument, Derrida reads these works as instances of *text*, as writing and examples of philosophical presentation (*Darstellung*). Here, he directs the attention to the notion of "preface" and its position in a philosophical exposition. According to Derrida's argument, the position of the preface in the Hegelian work is double: the task of the preface is to preface *and* deconstruct the preface. The role of the preface is thus double.[74]

On the one hand, the purpose of the preface is to serve as an introduction to and to give a summary of to the text that follows it. Thus, the preface is aimed at unifying and totalizing the book. The structures of unification and totalization are the opposite of dissemination: dissemination is what subverts all recuperative gestures of mastery—it is what disrupts the attempt to progress in an orderly way toward meaning or knowledge.[75] In thinking of Derrida's prime example, the preface, it would account for the book without anything that would remain outside of its scope. From a position of being inside the work, the preface would work as a "true" beginning to the book, as an introduction to its "truth." In other words, the preface would be internalized

and sublated into philosophy. On the other hand, the place of the preface is outside the book: it is questionable what is included in the preface and what its relation is to the written work: do they ever correspond with each other without any remnant?

For Derrida, both literary and philosophical texts and works of art are similar in that, as presentations, they are not reducible to their "subject matter." According to him, they never have a single "subject," but each presentation is involved with material that contradicts itself. From this, it follows that every event of reception depends on how the details of the work appear as a specific, unanticipated configuration and are received as such by the reader or viewer on that particular occasion. If we suppose that there is a truth of the work of art—if it were thought to be the truth of the presented subject, for example—it would be told from an outward position that would relate either to the presented thing itself, to the adequate representation, to picturality, or to truth in the order of painting.[76] This is why the truth can be *in painting* only, not in external knowledge on the depicted thing or the tradition of painting or any other art; from this perspective, Derrida's view corresponds with Heidegger's, for whom "art is the becoming and happening of truth" and allows "truth to spring forth."[77]

On such basis, Derrida's argument is that the boundaries of any text, a preface or a painting, for example, are never clear: defining the boundaries would mean the thinking of immanence. Namely, the Preface of his expositions accounts for what follows it and therefore becomes sublated, so that a third text, their "synthesis," would appear as a result. Therefore, it is not possible to point out where the "work" is, and it is as impossible to say where to draw the limits of a philosophical system. Referentiality and supplementarity that belong to all texts influence on and necessitate each other and have an effect on how the larger meaning is conceived. This amounts to how the "thing itself" appears for the perception of the work: the left-overness or remnants of the outwork, in other words, the supplement, now becomes the main thing. Derrida calls it *restance*: that which is rest of the work, lacks signification and therefore resists being analyzed and translated.[78] It appears that for Derrida preface, like any other "outwork," stands as an example of the instability of oppositions: it is both present and absent at the same time, as well as neither of them. Hence, he inquires: "What is this text which cannot be either inside philosophy or outside it, neither in the markings, nor in the marchings, nor in the margins, of the book? This term that is never sublated by the dialectical method without leaving a remainder?"[79]

Derrida describes the preface, the "past" of a text, something that exists as written, which, under the false appearance of a present, a hidden omnipotent author, in full mastery of his product, is presenting to a reader as his future. It is no single guiding thesis in a text but textual displacement.[80] There is more than one thesis inscribed within dissemination, which now refers to the impossibility of reducing a text as such to its effects

or meaning, content, thesis, or theme. Such remainder, be it in the form of preface, ornament, or the frame of a painting, is neither a pure form, completely empty nor a content, a moment of meaning, since it remains external to the logos of which it indefinitely feeds the critique. As purely "rhetorical" ornament, the remainder is to be posed in and by the outwork (*hors-livre*). Yet, if the *raison d'être* of the preface is to *remain*, Derrida inquires: Does it *exist*?[81]

To answer this, Derrida proposes that the space of the outwork diverges in place of the *khôra*. Its spacing is to serve as the preface to a rereading. In Derrida's thinking, the concept of *khôra* does not mean a place (*lieu*) in a general sense, but it refers to an abysmal chiasm, for which Plato's *Timaeus* serves as a point of origin. It is neither sensible nor intelligible, but belongs to a "third kind," *triton genos*. *Khôra* is the place of origin, in which the differences in each presence are outlined. Yet *khôra*, which is neither being nor nonbeing, is itself a placeless place, an abysmal gap between all oppositions.[82] Such a place remains without identity. *Khôra* cannot be located anywhere, and therefore it exists beyond all form. Like *différance*, *khôra* is at the same time a temporal and a structural notion and includes a presence that is always postponed. For this reason, the "origin"—the form of things—can never be full presence for Derrida. Rather, it exists as trace. This means that a thing is never quite present to us as such, since our experiences are always influenced by memories, associations, and thinking.[83]

In the thinking of the outwork, we have come to a threshold, *limen*, of the text—to the threshold that is at the same time a *limes*: boundary, mark, march, margin, and demarcation. This means arriving at the question that, according to Derrida, "also announced itself, explicitly, as the question of the *liminal*" and exists beyond the oppositions form/content, signifier/signified, sensible/intelligible, and writing/preface.[84] In this case, the "signifier" is the name of a merely circumstantial, conventional occurrence of the concept or a concession without any specific effect. It would be an affirmation of the autonomy of meaning, of the ideal purity of an abstract, theoretical history of the concept.

Derrida's notion of the dissemination inscribed in the literary work and, in specific, in the preface or foreword raises necessary questions about the limits of each system: is philosophy bound to expose itself within the limits that are known beforehand, at the outset of the exposition? Derrida points to the possibility of a more complex process of signification, where the preface and other parts of a literary work are not reducible to one another. What he suggests is that there is always a possibility of unanticipated remainder: material, empirical *traits* of the text.[85]

The "outwork" thus appears to be associated with the question of the possibility of radical otherness, which is ubiquitous in Derrida's philosophy.[86] Thereby, the notions of writing and identity become interrogated in the context of the work. At the center of interest is here the gray area between the inside and the outside of the identity of the work. It appears as undefinable and undecidable, or definable only in a certain situation, according to the unique instances of what counts as "work"—work that has lost its conceptual coherence and essence.

THE *PARERGON* AND THE PASSE-PARTOUT

Not only does the opening chapter of *The Truth in Painting*, "Passe-Partout," serve as a preface to the book, but it also lays out one of the central purposes of the tradition of deconstruction: to show that neither things appear as transparent structures nor do we have any direct access to them. Derrida sets forth from conceptual blind spots that exist in all texts, and between text and its meaning there is constant movement back and forth. For this reason, meanings are constantly in motion. In between text and meaning, although not in any specific location, occurs what Derrida calls *différance*. With this expression, he refers to the production of differences, which is nothing in itself—"neither a word nor a concept."[87] At the most, it is a space in which the sense of things may be born.

A text constitutes a network of the production of differences and of differentiation, in which the author's claims are built up again in a literary text. Derrida and other poststructuralists are against the notion that the author could have a meaning that he/she could transfer to the reader as such. The starting point here is especially Heidegger's term *Destruktion*: it means the deconstruction and putting together again of the philosophical tradition of Antiquity in such a way that concepts are examined so that they finally reveal what kinds of presuppositions lie behind them and they begin to show their own content. In his philosophy, Jean-Luc Nancy has adopted a similar procedure, but also in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thinking there exists the notion of the "blind spot," which is partly equivalent of Derrida's idea of the opacity of language, as evidenced by its internal densities and slips.[88]

The essay "Parergon" in *The Truth in Painting* is concerned with what is interior and exterior of concepts—what is part of them and what is not. Namely, how to define a concept, when there is no return to oppositions? In the background of the essay, one can see Derrida's reading of Immanuel Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment, which is formed by the free play

of the faculties of mind—understanding and imagination—the aesthetic object and the relevant concept. These are neither identical nor similar to one another. The term *parergon* appears only once in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, and even then in parenthesis; therefore, why Derrida gives to the *parergon* so much attention may be worth asking.[89] Derrida's suggestion to what constitutes the aesthetic judgment or experience is that the object and the concept do not have a clear frame: the one that would determine and define things as each other's opposites. This inquiry entails the crucial question of the limits of a theoretical discourse: how to describe the influence that theory and art have on each other, if we still presuppose that they do not determine each other?

Derrida begins the inquiry into the concepts of the frame and the *parergon* by a deconstructive reading of Immanuel Kant's theory of beauty in the *Critique of Judgment*. In Kant, the question concerning philosophy and the aesthetic judgment—how to bring together the conceptual and the nonconceptual?—means the question of the possibility of reconciliation between the judgments of knowledge and judgments of beauty or of taste, which are essentially without concept.[90] If logical judgments depend on the correlation between the concept and the phenomenon, aesthetic judgments are subjective and thus applied to the object of beauty without any determining rule. Namely, Kant's theory gathers together without-concept and concept, universality without concept and universality with concept.[91] Yet, Derrida sees a risk of constant overflowing in Kant's thinking on the aesthetic: he claims that, by transposing and forcing a logical frame on a nonlogical structure, Kant formulates a structure which no longer essentially concerns a relation to the object as object of knowledge. Thus, Kant creates a system, grounded in various kinds of oppositions, that is no longer constituted by the areas it limits. To the contrary, Derrida claims, Kant's system of the judgment of beauty encounters the risk of constant overflowing (*débordement*) of what does not fit into the discourse of beauty.[92] Derrida addresses this question in length also in "Economimesis."

The very frame of Kant's theory is threatened by what exceeds it—namely, the perception and feeling of beauty itself, with the colors and sounds, which Kant tries to adapt to a conceptual scheme.[93] According to Derrida, Kant has created a system of beauty that is not constituted by what it frames, but its *lack* forms the frame of the theory. That is, the framing of the Kantian aesthetic discourse is formed by what it cannot hold and control. Derrida wonders what would happen if the lack were not only the lack *of* a theory of the frame but the *place* of the lack in a theory of the frame.[94] Therefore, any frame appears to be essentially constructed and therefore fragile, and this is the only essence or truth of the frame—"if it had any," he adds.[95] Such truth, as *parergon*, is neither transcendental nor accidental. It is produced in a context: since it is "nothing natural," it does not exist.[96]

In *The Truth in Painting*, deconstruction now appears as a *parergon* to Kant's aesthetics. Reading the term *parergon* in a systematic work allows Derrida to access a philosophical metadiscourse that undermines the foundations of reasoning, without seeking to destroy the value of truth that emerges from the Kantian text. As the foundations of the text are based on metaphysical categories, such as the opposition inside and outside, or even essential and accessory, the notion of *parergon* designates the tension between the work and the outwork.[97] It appears as the privileged object of the deconstructive project. The *parergon* means to Derrida the reversal of what he sees to form a clear opposition.

According to Derrida, "Parergon" is about the idiom, that is, language, in painting. However, Derrida announces that he is not interested in it, the horizon of the essay being the incompatibility of language and painting, the incompatibility between form and content of art. He asks *what* the person is interested in who announces, "I am interested in the idiom (language) in painting": to be exact, is it the idiom "in painting," in words in painting or in the words "in painting"? Or in the idiom or expression in painting, the idiomatic trait or style? Or perhaps the specificity and singularity of pictorial art, of that "language" which painting is supposed to be?[98]

One may see that no one can dominate the situation, translate it, or describe it.[99] Derrida says that he is forced to renew, reproduce, and reintroduce the situation into the formalizing economy of his tale, overload it each time with a new supplement, until the very indecision that he is trying to reduce. Indecision or undecidability points at something impossible, in the sense that being cannot be returned to significations and representations. This means that being does not fit in the categories of presence and absence: it is ontologically something that cannot be appropriated and grasped—it is what *différance* or an intermediate space or state can only return to.[100] Thus, what remains open and undecidable, is not yet any representation of a thing, neither being nor nonbeing, neither presence nor absence, but the belonging together of alternatives, their being layered inside one another, or their circularity, which makes them to constantly turn into each other. The question of meaning therefore moves beyond what is understood as identity or essence, and cannot be made into a subject: there is something unnameable and indefinable. This, like the meaning of the "work of art," is an aporia, an unsolvable problem.

For this reason, the definition of a thing—of art or the work of art, for example—is for Derrida finally related with the question concerning the other: how to speak about the other person or any kind of thing without returning it to the sphere of the same? In other words, is there a possibility to avoid returning to something we already know and are somehow able to dominate?

To define the *parergon* in a preliminary manner, it can be called a supplement outside the work. It is the concept of the remark, insofar as it defines what comes to be added to a text, for example, without being a part of it and yet without being absolutely extrinsic to it. Thus, *parerga* are "additives" which are neither inside nor outside the work.[101] If the *parergon* is to have the status of a philosophical quasi-concept, it must designate a formal and general predicative structure, which one can transport intact or deformed according to certain rules, into other fields, to submit new contents to it. *Parergon* is activity or operation which comes beside or against: it inscribes something that comes as an extra, exterior to the proper field—like to the pure reason in Kant—but whose transcendent exteriority "comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit itself," so that the exteriority intervenes in the inside only insofar as there is no inside.[102] Hence, the *parergon* is lacking *in* something and it is lacking *from itself*. In Kant, because reason is conscious of its impotence to satisfy its moral need, Derrida sees that it has recourse to the *parergon*, to grace, to mystery, and miracles. It needs the supplementary work.

The place of truth and figure are subject to constant displacement in art, and hence the question of the frame, *parergon*, becomes of importance to Derrida. Since it is difficult to discern where the work, *ergon*, really is or on what condition it is perceivable, he has chosen to approach what surrounds the work. This is the frame or the context, which is generated in all theories and other contexts of art and which thus multiplies and is renewable according to theories and to other artistic inventions.[103] The "work" itself remains too material to be examined by means of language. Therefore, the frame is equivalent to writing: it is created and recreated in writing. The frame is something that remains without place and is neither a work nor anything outside of the work. The *parergon* evokes the question of inside and outside, what remains inside the frame, and what is excluded from it. The confrontations between the inside and the outside become blurred, however—the *parergon* is the point of origin for a work and disturbs the discourse of painting and the way it is internally constructed.[104]

Derrida perceives it to be impossible to define and delimit the scope of art and the work of art *per se*. This is primarily for the reason that all systems are imperfect in the sense that they contain gaps and are therefore never totalizable. Hence, Derrida finds it necessary to inquire about the frames a work of art: where to draw the lines of what belongs to a text and what is outside of does not belong to it, and if such limiting is possible. In *The Truth in Painting*, the notions of the *parergon*, the frame and the passe-partout offer answers to this question. Namely, Derrida claims, each discourse can be limited in countless ways depending on what is included in its context. Consequently, it proves impossible to set definite limits for any system, the work of art being a

primary example of this. The fundamental problem concerns the nature of the work of art: whether it is possible to delimit it, or even delimit the question of its boundaries and the ideas that the work of art offers examples of. To give a positive, general content to the "work of art" has been the object in many earlier aesthetic theories, whereas Derrida's thinking is obviously inclined toward an anti-essential and even anti-aesthetic notion of art.

The discussion around the *parergon* is aimed at providing an answer to the question concerning our ways of naming and delimiting things. For Derrida, the *parergon* as an additive and supplement is worth attention because it means a threat for the integrity and coherence of a philosophical discourse, a theme that already appears in his essay "Economimesis."[105] The *parergon* makes visible from a specific point of view the problem that is present throughout Derrida's writing: what happens to a meaning when it is removed from its "original" context to a new one? How to describe the relation between a text and a context?[106] The supplement is neither inside nor outside of the work, and it neither overflows the work nor belongs entirely to the outwork, the *hors-d'œuvre*, and yet the supplement comes to extenuate an internal lack. The lack constitutes the work, but according to Derrida, the aesthetic tradition has avoided to see it. For example, a column is accessory to a building, but without the column, a palace is not a palace.[107]

To show the working of the discourse and its supplements, Derrida takes up an example given by Kant, namely statues.[108] Following the example, the clothing and drapery on statues (*Gewänder an Statuen*) would have the function of a *parergon* and an ornament.[109] This means, as Kant makes clear, that which is no internal (*innerlich*), as an integral part (*als Bestandstück*) to the total representation of the object but which belongs to it only in an extrinsic way as a surplus, an addition, an adjunct, a supplement. To Derrida, the *hors-d'œuvres* are, then, the clothes of statues, which both decorate and veil the nudity of the human figure. The *hors-d'œuvre* is stuck on the edging of the work nonetheless, and to the edging of the represented body to the extent that they supposedly do not belong to the whole of the representation. What is represented in the representation would be the naked and natural body; the representative essence of the statue would be related to this, and the only beautiful thing in the statue would be that representation. For Kant, it alone is essentially, purely and intrinsically beautiful, the proper object of judgment of taste.

Truth is placed *hors d'œuvre*, in the margins outside of the work. According to Jean-Luc Nancy's reading, the intelligence and the senses are positioned outside of each other, but they touch upon each other's domains.[110] Therefore, the relation to the outside becomes the principal issue here. Art means, for Nancy, contact between disparate *traits*. Hence,

it forms writing that is impossible to make sense of, as the logic involved in the encounter of the *traits* leads to turning around or having access to neither the "traced traits" (*traits tracés*) that exist outside of words, nor to other traits. Instead of showing themselves "as they are"—there is no such thing—they offer to perception a shadow of their own trace. With this shadow, a truth of the writing reveals itself: it extends to the words outside the words but is never present in those words.

The categories and oppositions for distinguishing the work of art from what is merely its supplement prove vague and arbitrary. The delimitation of the center and the integrity of the representation, of the inside and the outside, might already seem strange: therefore, he inquires where to have clothing commence and where does the *parergon* begin and end. Would any garment be a *parergon*, such as absolutely transparent veils? Is it possible to transpose this statement to painting? To find an answer, Derrida discusses Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Lucretia* (1532). As Lucretia holds in the painting only a light band of transparent veil in front of her sex, what is it that we can call the *parergon*: is it the dagger in Lucretia's hand, when the dagger is not part of her body and she holds it turned toward herself, touching her skin? Or is the necklace Lucretia wears around her neck a *parergon*?

For Derrida, the question involved in the *parergon* concerns its representative and objectivizing essence, of its outside and its inside, of the criteria engaged in this delimitation, as well as the value of naturalness that is presupposed by it. If any *parergon* is only added on by virtue of an internal lack in the system to which it is added, what is it that is lacking in the representation of the body so that the garment should come and supplement it?

The meanings of *parergon* include the exceptional idea of the strange and the extraordinary.[111] These meanings make one inquire where the criterion, the critical organ and the organum of discernment come from. For Derrida, such a question is obscure and produces even an extra difficulty: in Kant, the *parergon* is added to a work which does not represent anything and which is itself already added to nature. There is a field where it is difficult to decide whether a thing is natural or artificial, and, were it artificial, whether it is the *parergon* of the *ergon*. To shed further light on these questions, Derrida presents one more example of the supplementary *parerga* in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, namely columns around sumptuous buildings. We know what does or does not belong to the human body, whereas in a work of architecture, the *Vorstellung*, the representation, is not structurally representational or else is so only through detours complicated enough to disconcert anyone who tried to discern, in a critical manner, the inside from the outside, the integral part and the detachable part.[112]

What about a window of a building in a painting? What constitutes them as *parerga* is not simply their exteriority as a surplus, but it is the internal structural link that rivets them to the lack in the interior of the *ergon*. This lack would be constitutive of the very unity of the *ergon*.

The statement "I am interested in the idiom in painting" simultaneously both frames and unframes *The Truth in Painting*. Derrida takes a keen interest in these words originally pronounced by Paul Cézanne (1839–1906). According to Derrida, Cézanne once promised to tell the truth in painting by writing "I owe you the truth in painting and I will tell it to you" in a letter to Émile Bernard, a French painter and writer, in October 1905. From Cézanne's sentence, Derrida draws the conclusion that "the truth in painting" is always something that is owed, for Cézanne "owed the truth."[113] This saying makes Derrida ask how a painter can *acknowledge* a debt, if the acknowledgment also means committing to pay back one's debt. An acknowledgment of debt commits as much as it describes: it subscribes (the painter) to (a debt).

Cézanne's statement does not describe or represent anything: the sentence in no way operates in the mode of statement or assertion (*constat*), it says nothing that exists outside the event which it constitutes, but it commits the signatory with an utterance which the theorists of speech acts would call "performative," more exactly a "promise." The "debt" is a speech act which for Derrida bears a similarity with Cézanne's paintings: namely, both are by nature performatives and belong to the category of promises.[114]

What does Cézanne do, then? "I owe you" is an acknowledgement of the debt that commits him to pay it off: therefore, it is a performative. Cézanne promises to "do" something, the content and form of the promise are both performatives and promise to do something. The sentence "I owe you the truth in painting" is not descriptive and does not claim anything, but it is rather an event by nature—a promise to "do" something, when it is pronounced. In the same way, Derrida concludes, a painting neither says nor describes anything. This means that it only shows itself: the painting shows the truth of its own appearing.

To Derrida, Cézanne's utterance generates a *promise*, an event itself.[115] So, he inquires whether a speech act theory has its counterpart in painting, and whether it knows its way around painting. The issues of intentionality and truth come now under consideration: what is truth, if it can "be owed" (*due*), even be rendered (*rendue*), in painting? Derrida ends up on the assumption that the truth in painting would be "a characteristic trait of Cézanne": a trait or a pun combining the play of language, chance, and the notion of economy. Idioms and a dialect are related to the ellipticity

of language: if these existed in completely pure forms, they would be able to reveal language to their own chance; there would be, what cannot be translated; that is, completely pure idiomatic expressions, such as "truth in painting" is a performative expression concerning the debt, being a pun in itself. In general, "ellipse" means the omission of one or several words in a sentence, which nevertheless are understood in the context of the remaining elements. In Derrida, ellipticity holds an essential position: the meaning never returns to itself but is always displaced or dislocated. For instance, when we hear or read something, it is never quite the same thing as the speaker has thought.

For this reason, the meaning of a thing occurs to us always in the form of trace or memory, never as it "is." Derrida is therefore interested in what remains as untranslatable: what is never said and what can be understood in many ways, like the idiom of "truth in painting." In other words, the untranslatable is what remains outside of a discourse; it is undecidable, impossible. Because the French language is not a painting, he suggests that the truth is not in painting that would represent it; it is merely its double, however good a likeness it is; it is precisely other by reason of the likeness.[116]

The painting does not represent the truth of itself while presenting it.[117] Cézanne's idiom opens a gap, which to Derrida's mind corresponds to the notion of "rift" (*Riss*) in Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art*; in the French translation, the *Riss* appears as *trait*.[118] By saying that for Cézanne, the truth is either truth of a representation or presentation, Derrida wants to make clear that he is pointing to a specific kind of truth, that of painting and its own logic. This truth pertains to the *picturality* of the presentation or of the representation; it is truth in painting, and not truth in discourse like usually, or in other art forms, like literature, poetry, theater, architecture, or sculpture. Such truth in pictorial mode is either presented or represented; the expression "truth in painting" is moved from the greater form of usage, but in such a way that the grammar, syntax, and semantics are more or less normal. These requirements meet the definition of an idiom.

Finally, the truth we are speaking of is the *truth of truth*.[119] This, of course, means that the force of "truth" opens onto an abyss to Derrida; then, perhaps what is at stake in painting is truth, and what is at stake in truth is the abyss. The expression *passe-partout* now begins to refer to the division and multiplication of the line which purports to mark the edges of the system of painting; the division begins from the idiom "passe-partout," and the idiom connects the form and content too tightly together, in order to translate the idiom. In painting, at stake is the truth and, in it, the idiom—that is, the gap formed by the idiom—if we suppose that the "truth in painting" has the power of truth.

Cézanne's trait or play of words acts as a passe-partout, but it is merely an appearance. To be asked now is *what* does passe-partout do, and what does it cause to be done or shown? That is, how is it comparable to the idea of performativity? Derrida points out that by writing, "I owe you the truth in painting and I will tell it to you," the painter does not promise to *paint* these four "truths in painting," but he promises to *say* these truths. Cézanne does not speak of painting but swears an oath to say, by speech, the truth in painting. From this Derrida concludes that painting happens in the connection between the letter and discourse. If Cézanne promises to say the truth, its saying is equal to doing or acting, either discursive or visual acting, or even a combination of these. As a result, there remains a dream of painting without truth, and finally Derrida begins to "doubt" whether Cézanne has really promised anything at all. The promise would thus be performative through and through, revealing nothing but its own saying.

Inside and Outside of the Frame

In *The Truth in Painting*, to frame a work of art refers to defining what is essential to it—what the work is about and what somehow belongs to it and what does not. The interrogation of the frame is recurrent in Derrida's writing about art: where are the limits in the discourse on painting? Is it rather the work or its context that establishes the frame? Is it possible to differentiate these aspects from one another? At stake in the search for the frames of the work of art is the search for philosophy that is not concerned with formulating definitions for art, the work or any other thing, but with giving various alternatives instead of one general determination. Concurrently, one may consider *what* the object of definition is. Is it really the art object "itself," in its material being, or a certain similarity between different and perhaps innumerable works of art? To name something a "work of art," do we wish to give a name to something that is produced according to a certain tradition of making art, or are we rather speaking of the reception of works of art? Or philosophical discourses on art and its works? In front of the diversity of approaches to art, deconstructionists—Derrida perhaps more than anyone else—has addressed the possibilities offered by the notions of context, the frame, and the *différance*, which all have their origin in the notion of abyss of signification.

To propose what constitutes the work, Derrida's formulates his answer in negative terms: in the interior of the work, *ergon*, there is a lack. This lack is constitutive of the very unity of the *ergon*.[120] The concept of *parergon* indicates the limit of the work, artistic or even philosophical work, from the inside. At the same time, Derrida understands the *parergon* to be a legacy for aesthetics, an invitation aesthetics to reconsider his understanding of art.[121]

The *parergon* thus signals that the unity of the work is incomplete: "The *ergon's* lack is the lack of a *parergon*."[122]

However, one cannot speak of painting as a discourse without reproducing the very limits that constitute painting, whatever the limits do and say. Considering the limits, they have an inside and an outside of the work as soon as there is work. The limits of painting cause problems, for one cannot necessarily tell what belongs to it and what does not. Therefore, the discourse is subject to change—any trait (play of words, that is) is never common, not even one; its divisibility founds text, traces, and remains. It is no longer important to ask, "What is a *trait*?," but how the *trait* treats itself—the *trait never appears*.[123] Therefore, the truth in painting exists neither inside nor outside of a thing; it is in some space but does not allow itself to be framed, nor does it remain outside the frame.

Derrida gives his first definition to the *parergon* in the chapter "Passe-Partout" on the opening pages of *Truth in Painting*—"I write four times here, *around* painting."[124] Having turned four times around the painting, Derrida turns to the *parergon*. It gives a place for the *ergon* in what surrounds it: frame, title, signature, museum, archive, reproduction, discourse, and market, texts written for the exhibition. For him, the frame is everywhere where one creates laws concerning the right to painting by delimiting it.[125] All these contribute to Derrida's notion that they disturb the inner discourse of the painting, all works of art, their evaluation, surplus value of all particular details that overflow a given discourse, and speculations and hierarchies.[126] Such elements make it possible to transcend the "great philosophies" of art written by Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger.

Yet, there is no clarity as for where the *parergon* comes from.[127] In his attempt to answer this, Derrida refers to Kant's analytic of beauty: the function of a *parergon* and an ornament means for Kant "that which is not internal or intrinsic (*innerlich*), as an integral part (*als Bestandstück*), to the total representation of the object (*in die ganze Vorstellung des Gegenstandes*) but which belongs to it only in an extrinsic way (*nur äusserlich*) as a surplus, an addition, an adjunct (*als Zuthat*), a supplement."[128] Here at stake are the elements of the work that Kant judges to be exterior to the presentation and that are thus merely additional: the Kantian aesthetic judgment *must* relate to intrinsic beauty, not on additional elements such as ornaments.[129] By giving examples, he wants to illuminate his thesis of pure judgment of taste that would not be associated with the feeling of pleasure; pleasure, such as the "accidental" pleasure given by color, voice, and smell, is material and thus inferior to the universality of the form of beauty.[130] For Derrida, this is a sign that Kant tries to determine and delimit beauty by creating an idea of disinterestedness that finally gives us a "scentless and colorless tulip," although, at the same time, Kant states that in art there cannot be sensations

and experiences without the qualities of a particular object. In Derrida's conclusion, the frame thus created to delimit beauty is nothing natural: in fact, he says, "*There is* frame, but it *does not exist*."[131] It remains to be asked what the *parergon* is, if it is not merely the synonym of ornament in Kant's philosophy. For Derrida, the *parergon* covers a larger semantic field: it is the outwork acting alongside and against the work, *ergon*.

Motivating the post-phenomenological thinking on art is the philosophers' inclination to deny Hegel's idea of reducing the identity of the contingent other into the "sameness" of its origin—for instance, to the truth of its own idea. Such a reduction in the context of art results in the loss of that which holds the most importance to theorists of avant-garde within both modern and postmodern context: art's potential to retain its novelty and strangeness. To affirm the possibility of true creativeness of art, the notion of truth as the reduction of the other into the same must be discarded; as a result, the analysis of relations between things becomes more significant than the consideration of essences and substances.[132] Therefore, notions such as image, representation, and truth are intertwined, to the extent that fiction is shown to be the condition of truth.[133] In this, the influence of Nietzsche's philosophy and the tradition of structuralism are both evident in their own way. Although the deconstructive notion of the work of art remains without a definable substance or essence, the theoretical framework that surrounds the themes connected with the work of art nevertheless necessarily presupposes certain limits to the object of examination—the scope of the artwork. To quote Derrida, "From that which forever frames the frame, one can in fact start out."[134]

The function of the frame is decisive and normative; it regulates, filters, compresses, crops, and rejects.[135] Yet Derrida's understanding of the frame extends beyond any normative conception. To the contrary, he proposes that in each system, the frame included, are involved elements of undecidability: something that remains unstable, even unclear, for example, to what category it belongs.[136] Thus, it is impossible to tell in a general fashion that would be valid at any time and in any circumstances what belongs to the category of the "work of art." This is for the reason that artists make new works, novel phenomena appear within both art and its theories, and the different frameworks for their appreciation, or their contexts, are constantly subject to change. In his entire *œuvre*, Derrida aims at showing the fragility and conventional nature of the limits of a conceptual system or discourse in the culture—in *The Truth in Painting*, he focuses on the concepts of passe-partout, the *parergon* and the frame. As Philip Armstrong has suggested, in a larger context of recent theories, the search of limits means addressing the decision in which painting or any work "touches the limits of its (im)possibility and undecidability."[137] As I see it, this impossibility gives the motive of Derrida's inquiry:

it is abandonment that is at once a gift and an irreducible excess, an enabling and originary condition: in Armstrong's words, "For that abandonment, there is neither pathos nor mourning."[138]

Throughout their style and content, *The Truth in Painting* and especially its essays "Passe-Partout" and "Parergon" reflect the tradition of deconstruction. In these, Derrida approaches a variety of questions encircling the questions "what is art?" and "what is the work of art?" Such questions already provide an answer: namely, that art would be predetermined or precomprehended in them. Teleology and hierarchy are thus prescribed in the question "What is art?"[139] Namely, Derrida states that theories of art in general turn it into an object in which one is supposed to discern an inner, unified meaning that lies veiled beneath external, varied features. This question closes art in its circle, but its discourse on art is at once, for the same reason, caught in a circle.[140] Yet, this is not to say that Heidegger's thinking on art would be bound to any variety of essentialism.

From here, the frame presents itself as the center of the problem: where does the frame take place, does it take place, where does it begin, where does it end? What is its internal limit and its external limit, and its surface between these two limits? Before deciding what is parergonal, one has to know what the *parergon* is. To begin with, Derrida doubts if there is any such thing in the first place. It is, therefore, essential to ask how to determine the intrinsic or what is framed, and know what one is excluding as frame and outside-the-frame, if we suppose that we are already at the unlocatable core of the problem.

The notion of the *parergon* has in Derrida's analysis a concrete sense that comes close to the modernist understanding of the frame to the painting: a frame makes a painting what it is by setting its boundaries. For Derrida, the *parerga* have a thickness: a surface which separates the *parerga* not only from the integral inside, from the body proper to the *ergon*, but also from the outside, from the wall on which the painting is hung, from the space in which statue or column is erected, then, step by step, from the whole field of historical, economic, political inscription in which the drive to signature is produced.[141] The frame thus frames both the work of art and its theories.[142] According to the traditional determination of the *parergon*, it does not stand out but disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy. Derrida's definition differs from this notion in a crucial fashion: the frame is neither purely present nor absent, which is why the *parergon* distinguishes itself both from the *ergon*, the work, and from the surrounds, and it is discernible like a figure on a ground, but not in the same way as the work. The frame, however, does not form a background for a figure.[143] To clarify this idea, Derrida takes up different borderline cases in art—for instance, how can the frames be described in looking at the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel in Rome?

For Derrida, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* presents itself as a multifaceted work, *ergon*, and as such it ought to allow itself to be centered and framed, to have its ground delimited by being marked out, with a frame, against a general background—yet this frame is problematical. Therefore, Derrida admits that he does not know what is essential and what is, by contrast, merely an addition to a work.[144] The *parergon* divides in two—the criterion of exclusion of the *parergon* shows to be merely a formality.

In his examples of art, Derrida applies his theory of framing to suggest that the notion of work is destined to escape the theoretical grasp.[145] It appears that in fine art his notion is best applicable to works with a more or less clearly defined "subject," even a figurative one. In abstract painting with no evident figures or no evident pictorial focus, or in which the intensity remains the same, it is difficult to tell by looking at the painting what its "subject" is and what would be deemed as supplementary to it. The same can be said of installation art and other "new" art forms, videos, films, and varieties of site-specific art, such as performances and environmental art. In determining what forms the work "itself" and what belongs to its context, there seems to be no difference for Derrida in whether the image has a recognizable figure in focus. Derrida's, as well as Nancy's, theories are against the Kantian idea of differentiating the *ergon* and the *parergon*: all details of the work and its context influence on every other detail, and no addition and change leaves the work intact. For this reason, the work of art is both internally and externally limitless: open and infinitely finite.

The problems of framing and *parergon* open up different questions concerning the constitution of truth and signification in Derrida. They are not alone but dependent on their context: supplement, seriality, and truth that parasitizes on another truth. Language and the work of art are separate things, but is language used of them, philosophical or otherwise, part of the works? In turn, what forms part of the language of (art) philosophy, of its discourse? What can language do for a work of art: add, delimit, or remove something of it? By speaking philosophically about works of art, Derrida's idea may be to demonstrate in practice the permeability and constant displacement of their conceptual frameworks, as he draws attention to aspects created by the image and the language it produces or that is produced by the philosophical discourse itself. It becomes impossible to say where the boundary between the discursive and the nondiscursive goes, or where the limit between the discourse employed on language and the discourse of the image goes. Derrida seems to point to the possibilities of language that speaks about the abysmal limit between the nonlinguistic and the linguistic, between language and the image: language that borders on the dividing, limitless border of language and image.

In Kant's theory, there is, however, no *parergon* in general, but only a plurality of *parerga*, that is, ornaments without *ergon* and other things that

are "merely agreeable." Opposed to the work that is concerned with the form of beauty, the "ornaments" attract attention to the beauty of the work itself. On the grounds of Derrida's view on Kant, it has been proposed that Derrida, rather than attempting to make an interpretation of the theory of beauty, examines it to discover the metaphysical structure of the philosophy of art. Derrida's statement in *The Truth in Painting* does not reside first in the theory of beauty considered for itself, but rather in the critique of the great philosophies of art and all that makes the very concept of "aesthetics" problematic. There are reasons to say that Derrida thus either writes against all that has been hostile to the *parergon* in the traditional philosophical discourse, or that Kant does not make of the *parergon* an opposite of the work of art and has never contested the *parergon*, but that Kant's writings are, rather in favor of it.[146]

In speaking of peasant shoes painted by van Gogh, Derrida remarks that the shoes are in painting *for* painting, not to be associated with the feet of somebody, either in the painting or outside it, but they are there "*for-painting*."[147] Painting's being "for-painting" implies what Derrida calls "pictural restance," visible in the open shoelaces in van Gogh's painting. Such *restance*, or excess of signification that always remains unsignified, can be described as abandonment that is akin to Heidegger's *Geworfenheit*, "thrownness": experience of nothingness and radical passivity that gives the original spatiality of being.[148] In Derrida, the *restance* in painting escapes all substantial and insignificant presence.[149]

The frame and the context open up the question of whether it is possible to limit the ground from the depicted "thing itself," the figure. Derrida investigates this philosophical problem from the point of view whether such distinction is possible in the first place, considering that the work is both internally and externally without boundaries to him. The underneath, the *hypokeimenon* or "underlying thing," hides another underneath as defined by Heidegger.[150] The Greek word *hypokeimenon* refers to that which lies beneath, primal matter or the substrate of all entities. As a nomination for the subject, this word refers to the notion that the "I" always underlies. As defined by Aristotle, the *hypokeimenon* is the subject of change: it stands for substance that persists throughout all change, the substratum, which has a function analogous to matter (*hyle*). It is matter that persists through the changes that form (*morphē*) imposes upon it.[151] In Derrida, the *hypokeimenon* hides or veils a "more" originary thingliness. Yet, as the "more" carries itself away, the thing no longer has the figure or value of an "underneath."

If it is impossible to say what finally belongs to a work of art, it is as impossible to say what forms the subject and what its ground is. Therefore, the relation between the ground and the subject matter is not unambiguous: depending on the situation, a new ground and a new substance appear, and they may change their places. This not only opens an abyss but would brusquely

and discontinuously prescribe a change of direction, or rather a completely different topic. Derrida describes the abysmal difference that opens between the subject and the ground an "offering" or "gift" (*Schenkung*) in Heidegger's terms: *it gives* in the abyss, so that it at once gives the abyss. As a result, there is, *es gibt*, the abyss: it is one of the three senses, in which truth is said to come to its installation, its institution, or its investiture (*Stiftung*) in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. The founding (*Gründen*) links it with the ground.[152] It resonates with the Heideggerian notion of being whose position is empty, the truth of the empty position being nothingness—that is, nothing but the openness of being, namely the idea that being is spoken in multiple ways and has thus no other ground than groundlessness.[153] In the work, matter—that is, earth or the thingness of the work in Heidegger—withdraws, and on this basis, the work comes to present itself.[154] In Derrida accordingly, the ground is groundless, as the *différance* between the figure and the ground is without foundation. Their distinction from one another is what distinguishes itself in front of us in the work of art.[155]

The *parergon* is never the one nor the other, but it differentiates and unites things. In fact, the frame makes a work of supplementary *désœuvrement*.[156] What arises here in Derrida's discussion is the abysmal structure of any act of delimitation: is a *mise en boîte* is always a *mise en abyme*? In his analyses of works of art, the elements of the *parergon*, supplement, remainder, and *désœuvrement* signal an idea of what does not belong to a system but still is not extrinsic to it. The pictorial elements of the works of art attest to that these elements are all equally significant or insignificant; if some elements were changed toward another, another kind of work with a different context would result of it. The *parergon* is a strategic concept. In *The Truth in Painting*, it gives rise to a *désœuvrement*, a work without work, or makes the work "unworking": the work that is never unified and limited. When Derrida analyzes Heidegger's discussion of van Gogh's painting *Old Shoes with Laces* in "Restitutions," he argues that there is no way of knowing if the shoes belong to either a peasant or a woman, or if they are really a pair of shoes, or what the true subject of the painting is—is it the shoes or the world or being they disclose?[157] Such questions unfold, from a specific perspective, Derrida's main theme, the question about truth in painting in relation to the inquiry about the truth of painting. The *différance* and the *trait* become part of the problematic of the frame.

One possible logic for Derrida's notion of art may be offered by the sublime*:* yet, he states, the beautiful and the sublime are hardly opposed to each other.[158] The presence of a limit is what gives form to the beautiful, whereas the sublime is to be found in an "object without form" and the "without-limit" is "represented" in it or on the occasion of it, and yet gives the totality of the without-limit to be *thought*—not to be sensed. Thus, the

beautiful seems to present an indeterminate concept of the understanding, the sublime an indeterminate concept of reason. To be inquired now what the form of art is, and what is its "opposite"? If art gives form by limiting, or even by framing, there can be a *parergon* of the beautiful, *parergon* of the column or *parergon* as column. However, it seems that there cannot be a *parergon* for the sublime. The colossal excludes the *parergon*; first of all, because it is not a work, an *ergon*, and then because the infinite is presented in it and the infinite cannot be bordered. The beautiful, on the contrary, requires the parergonal edging even more because its limitation is not only external: the *parergon* is called in by the hollowing of a certain lacunary quality within the work.

In Kant, aesthetic judgment necessarily bears upon the distinction between the intrinsic and the extrinsic, and hence, on the intrinsic beauty, not on its ornaments or surrounds.[159] Knowing how to determine the intrinsic—what is framed—and to know what one is excluding from it as frame and outside-the-frame is essential to Kant in Derrida's interpretation. He suggests that the "traditional" aesthetics, here represented by Kant, is unable to grasp the "intrinsic beauty" of the object as, to Derrida's mind, no such thing exists. This statement leads to explore the possibility of developing a theory of the aesthetic in the framework that stresses the context or the multiplying supplementarity or outwork instead of work. The questions in *The Truth in Painting* emerge from the aims set by deconstruction, but they also react to the situation in which it producing art within the scheme of beauty—or perhaps any other system—proves insufficient. Derrida seems to respond to a situation in which the effects of the outside, of society, institutions of art, and the proliferating practices of art make art constantly move outside its earlier sphere, beyond its own concept. The concepts of "art" and the "work" therefore appear to be without essence, ek-static, as they tend toward their outside: transcendence and exposition to their outside. Derrida seems to propose that art is exposed to its own sense that is always only becoming, and only this exposure constitutes it, if anything.[160]

To show the circularity involved in various theories of art, Derrida begins to approach circles which he sees as belonging to Hegel's, and also Heidegger's, philosophy of art. If we inquire, "What is art?," then this question assumes that we reach an agreement about what we understand by the word "art." In asking "what is the origin of the meaning of 'art'?," the key has always been the existence of works of art—as Hegel writes at the beginning of the *Aesthetics*, we have before us nothing but a single representation, in other words, the fact that there are works of art.[161]

As a result, the question becomes: What is the origin of the work of art?[162] The basis for this thought is that art—the word, the concept—has an originary

meaning, an etymon, a truth that is "one and naked" (*une vérité une et nue*), a signified, a referent, or even that there would be some opposition between presence and representation. But there is a multiplicity in art since, as Derrida and also Nancy suggest, art does not have a single meaning. This is the result of the polysemy of *techné*, or the techniques and technicity that are essential to artistic practices—there is no simple kernel that lies hidden behind the multiplicity. One of Derrida's statements is that art is not fundamentally historical by nature. This, he says, is attested to by the fact that the philosophy of art has always had difficulty in dominating the history of art.[163] His claim seems to be, then, that the existence of art cannot be given the form of a "grand narrative," a solid and simplified story of succession and development, which would inevitably reduce the singular variety of each work of art to a narrative schema.[164]

Because the expression "the truth in painting" molds the frame of the discourses of both truth and painting, it therefore corresponds to a *trait*. As Derrida underlines, "the truth in painting" is located in between of any opposite poles, between the inside and the outside, the interior and the exterior line of division, between the one who frames and what is framed, the figure and the ground, form and content, signifier and signified, and so forth. Thus, the *trait* divides these all in a place where it occurs. Derrida calls the topos the *passe-partout*. It is creative, but one cannot frame this topos of the passe-partout itself, since it is only between the interior and the exterior, a place where something takes place. The passe-partout itself is undiscoverable, for frames exist indefinitely within each other, and they are continuously enclosed one inside another. The passe-partout is inside a frame, a frame within a frame, but it does not form a frame in the strict sense, for it has a movable base. In other words, *différance* is constantly taking place here, which means that it is taking space within the frame. The passe-partout gives us something to see, lets or makes appear in its empty enclosure: the picture, the painting, the figure, the form, the system of strokes (*traits*) and colors. This all is to say that the passe-partout is everywhere, and we cannot avoid it, although its "reliability" or persistence may be only apparent, or exist from a specific viewpoint only. The deconstructive reading of the passe-partout and the frame leads Derrida to discuss the very limits of the work of art in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art" and their implied discourses of the work of art. It raises the question of whether there is any way of discerning what belongs to the work and what remains outside it and works only as a supplement.[165] However, for Derrida, the Kantian *parergon* is a limit between the work and its formal margin, and not the work and nonwork. The *parergon* is related to a closed totality of the work, but its closure precisely appears as a problem *vis-à-vis* its alleged content.

THE GROUNDLESS GROUND AND THE AUTOMATISM OF THE AUTHOR: ANTONIN ARTAUD

Derrida's inquiry into the thinking of the material conditions of painting leads to questions concerning its concrete framing. These issues are especially critical when thinking of contemporary practices of painting and other art forms that seem to be becoming more conceptual and philosophical and less medium-specific than before. In Derrida's thinking, the existence of the ground assures the inimitable singularity of the painting and all its details. However, the question of the ground is now more complex than before, for the material conditions of painting require an examination of their material support: how to describe it, and does it have any present identity? Is there still a material basis of which the painting, or any kind of work of art, would be undetachable, in a way that would prevent it from being assimilated into language?

Nowadays, larger varieties of works are referred to as paintings than before. There may be no paint or color applied by the artist at all in them, for example, in cases where the work is made of fabric or exists only in the form of digital algorithms. The support becomes the object of attention if the colored material has a shape other than a conventional flat, two-dimensional painting, like a sculptural figure or a work that is made of plastic and pieces of wood, metal, or ready-made objects.

The support is Derrida's focus in his studies of Antonin Artaud's (1896–1948) life and works since the 1960s.[166] Apart from Artaud's vocation as a playwright, poet, actor, and theater director, Artaud made from the late 1910s onwards a considerable amount of drawings and paintings. In his extensive texts on Artaud's pictorial work, Derrida puts forward the idea that Artaud's drawings are essentially concerned with writing—but, as becomes obvious, not only for the reason that they contain sentences. In a letter to Jean Paulhan from 1945, Artaud himself describes his illustrations as "written drawings," a nomination which becomes the first point of reference in Derrida's analysis.[167] In addition, Derrida also refers to Artaud's drawings as "pictographic work."[168] Such descriptions point to the idea that drawings and writing have an identical function for Artaud and that they concur toward the same end.[169] Several adjoining attributes connect drawing and writing: among these are citation, repetition, indirect nomination, invisible quotation marks, and allusion to the discourse of the other.[170] Artaud's graphic *traits* and writing—image and language in drawings—exist outside of each other, like in a kind of ecstasis, in which they remain inseparable and undetachable.[171]

In the essay "Maddening the Subjectile," Derrida's central concept is the "subjectile" in Artaud's work. Literally, this word points to space in between, that is, ground, medium, interposition, or meddling. The subjectile

is simultaneously a support and a surface, a subject and an object. In drawings, the subjectile designates the instability between the ground and the depicted subject or motif.[172] The drawing becomes a stage of the subjectile for the reason that it has the potential of destabilizing the identity and the limits of signification: we cannot say what, in a drawing or any other work of art, constitutes its veritable subject and what counts as supplement and context. The paradox—which forms the crux of Derrida's interpretation—follows from this: Artaud's drawings and paintings have the character of the subjectile, for they are positioned between the inside and the outside, the ground and the "subject" of the image, and this position does not cease to alternate.[173] It is interesting to notice that a similar shift takes place in Jean-Luc Nancy's deconstruction of the relation of the figure and the ground. As Nancy explains, in a painting the presence of a thing exchanges with its own disappearance. Between the figure and the ground takes place a movement of alternation.[174] This presence is not the permanence of a visible figure, but a singular, unrepeatable, irreplaceable, discontinuous, and discrete event of coming into presence: "presence only comes in the repetition of its coming" and reproduction of the unique presence. Nancy describes it as an event of discretion and plasticity—"a presence that mimes itself."

Regarding the constant change of places between the figure and the support, Derrida's theme of the *parergon* comes no doubt close to the effect inherent in Artaud's works of art. The subjectile or support between the subject and the object gradually takes over the drawings, remaining a "place of birth" for them: "Violently mishandled, the *parergon* will be from now on incorporated in the work, it will make part of it. Its exteriority, its transcendent neutrality, its mute authority will no longer be intact."[175] Thus, in Artaud's drawings, the margin, which usually frames the picture, enters the space of the figure, so that the identity of the work of art becomes unstable.

The structure of drawing corresponds to that of writing in that the drawing has the structure of the original supplement that also marks the condition of linguistic sense. The subjectile, being both the ground of the image, its visible exterior, and its material, is the work of art at its moment of birth. Here also, Derrida is looking after the uniqueness of the work of art, its sense outside of significations, which, in the manner of idioms of language, defies translation. The subjectile informs us about the event-like emergence of the work of art, its unrepeatable character, "which is as distinct from the form as from the meaning and the representation."[176] The subjectile hence resists being determined by any kinds of oppositions. Derrida refers to both language and drawing as "stages" or "scenes," which draw their power, not from Cartesian "clear ideas," but rather from the spontaneous creation "on stage" without resorting to words.[177] The *mise en scène*—in a word, theater—is their moment.

Yet we may well inquire why the subjectile, a quality that defines Artaud's drawings, seems to become accessible mainly in accordance with the paradigms of writing. In "Maddening the Subjectile," Derrida explores what constitutes the visual image in Artaud's drawings and paintings, *in* which Artaud often writes, although he never writes *about* them.[178] On such basis, Derrida ends up addressing Artaud's drawings and paintings as *pictograms*. In their current meaning, pictograms stand for pictorial symbols for a word or phrase. Derrida uses this term to point to the fact that in Artaud's works painting, drawing, and writings are merged, with no borders between either different arts or genres, or between supports or substances.[179] Pictograms are both subjects and objects at the same time, and neither of these: they do not portray the full presence of the depicted thing. At hand are never "*ob-jects* or subjects present for us," for notions such as the subject and object are all about "inertia."[180] Artaud's writings and drawings seem to possess the same function: they destabilize the historical relation between the subject, the object, and the subjectile; both pictures and inserted phrases bring with them "intonation and rhythm."[181] Artaud's pictograms are always installed in an interval *between* divisions such as above and below, visible and invisible, before and behind, this side and that; they are concerned with singularity and "the dynamics and energy of a motion."[182]

Derrida's treatise of Artaud involves the critique of the author, a theme that is equally in philosophical focus in Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault.[183] For Derrida's conception of art, the intention of the artist is not the primary source of meanings, nor is the author in general solely responsible for the work. With these notions, he participates in the widespread discussion initiated by Roland Barthes's essay "Death of the Author" in 1967 and continued by Michel Foucault in "What Is the Author?" in 1969. Yet the idea that the work of art may not be fully controlled by the author and is instead concerned with the effect of chance is already visible in automatism. Automatism is a method of producing paintings or drawings, as well as writing or other work, in which the artist suppresses conscious control over the movements of the hand.[184] Thereby he or she allows the unconscious mind to take over as if "without will." In automatism, spontaneity is the principle. Although some artists, like the British landscape painter Alexander Cozens in the eighteenth century, experimented with automatic painting by using watercolors, automatism is a mostly twentieth-century phenomenon. The Dadaists, especially Hans Arp, made occasional use of automatism, but for the Surrealists it was an important part of their artistic creation. In the first *Surrealist Manifesto*, published in Paris in 1924, the French poet André Breton (1896–1966) describes surrealism as "Psychic automatism in its purest state, by which one proposes to express . . . the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern."[185] The exploration of

the unconscious through the methods of automatic drawing that included a passive and receptive state of mind was supposed to lead to the discovery of some deeply personal psychological layers of the draughtsman's mind.

In his discussion of Antonin Artaud's surrealist drawings, the influence of the automatic drawing and writing is probable. The "automatic" drawing was not preoccupied by the trace, at least not in the sense of conveying an intended, definite message. As the outcome of the movement of the artist's hand, the physical product constituted the picture. However, it is doubtful whether it can be held as a drawing, at least if "drawing" is believed to be a conscious trace left on the ground by a chosen medium. In examining what constitutes the drawing in the moment of its coming into existence in the movement of the draughtsman's hand, Derrida finds a special interest in Artaud's account that his drawings are not drawings but closer to the act of giving birth to the trace:

> My drawings are not drawings but documents, // they have to be seen and what is *in* them has to be understood, // if they were being judged just from the artistic or lifelike point of view, as an object speaking and successful, you would say: that is very bold, but it lacks manual skill and technical formation and Mr. Artaud as a draftsman is still just a beginner, it will take him ten years of personal apprenticeship or in the polytechnics of the beaux-arts. // Which is false because I worked *ten* years on drawing my entire existence // but I *despaired* of pure drawing. . . . We have a mote in our eye from the fact that our present ocular vision is *deformed*, repressed oppressed, set back, and suffocated by a certain wrongdoing on the principle of our cranial box, as on the dental architecture of our being, from the coccyx at the base of the vertebrae to the place of the forceps sustaining the brain. // Struggling against this wrongdoing, I have pointed up and polished all the angers of my struggle, in the light of a certain number of totems of beings, and there remain these miseries, my drawings.[186]

To Artaud's drawings belongs perhaps an unintentionality and dispossession of the "artistic" result—they are perhaps art without art, and in a sense, art without author, or the author has detached himself of the requirement of talent and purpose in the action of drawing. At the same time, in Artaud's works of art seems to remain an ambiguity about the relation between the subject and the object. If the act of drawing is unintentional and "automatically" guided by the leaving of strokes, it may not be obvious who is drawing: the artist or the trace? In this process, drawing implies even something that comes close to the death of the author.

In considering Artaud's drawings as written drawings, Derrida claims that Artaud writes what cannot be written. Derrida's argumentation is thus grounded in an extended understanding of writing, to which the visual sphere

is repeatedly returned. Hovering between writing and drawing, Artaud's work holds the aspect of automatic writing and drawing.[187] The notion of automatic writing was essentially related to "pure psychic automatism," as André Breton defined surrealism in the *Surrealist Manifesto*.[188] Automatic drawing was considered as a means of expressing the subconscious and, to use Breton's expression, the "actual functioning of thought," when the drawing or writing hand was allowed to move "randomly" across the paper, free of rational control or ethical or aesthetic concerns. Several artists of the time, Joan Miró and Yves Tanguy among them, adopted this method that suggested drawing as an involuntary action that bypassed the command of the conscious mind. Connected with the automatism method several artists, Miró among them, used the biomorphic technique. By employing it, he generated organic images whose form relates to biological forms, while figures created biomorphically do not imitate the world in any realistic manner.

It seems now evident that automatic writing and drawing cannot be preoccupied by any trace, if drawing a trace is considered the result of intentional activity. In question rather appears to be the physical product of the hand. Evidently, in speaking of automatic drawing, the deliberate action of the draughtsman does not constitute the picture in the way of intentional outlining. The free but perhaps not fully uncontrolled movement of the hand may give the motivation for Artaud's words: "My drawings are not drawings." In addition to unintentionality at the base of the more or less automatic movement of the hand, his words can connote the artist's "disavowal" of the outcome of his work: it is no longer clear *who* has done this drawing or is entitled to sign it. An ambiguity is therefore born in the relation between the subject and the object of the work of art. Finally, a configuration like this may bring us in front of the questions concerning the death of the author. Unintentionality and dispossession of the "artistic" result make one think of the ambiguity of relation between the subject and the object in making art. At the same time, automatism as a technique corresponds the deconstructive aims in reading texts: the purpose is not to capture the author's intention but to view writing and text as such. Instead of reasoning or the contents of the author's psyche, the text or painting is suggested to disclose, right on its perceptible surface, all that is there. The death of the author amounts to the birth of writing and image.

DÉSŒUVREMENT: THE WORK BEYOND THE WORK

The questions concerning the work of art lead to the wider theme of the work and its deconstruction in Jacques Derrida's philosophy. According to Derrida,

in today's world, we have arrived at a situation in which the universal idea of the "work" has proved impossible and shows to be lacking a common essence and totality that would characterize all existing works. Instead, he suggests, art and its works exist in a state of *désœuvrement* or "unworking" mentioned above: a condition in which they cannot be made a work of—that is, a totality, a total work. In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida writes of van Gogh's painting *Old Shoes with Laces*, where the shoes are a useless, abandoned product "in a sort of idleness [*désœuvrement*]."[189] The term *désœuvrement* describes this operation, as do its several translations in English: "unworking (work)," "worklessness," "inoperativeness," and even "idleness."

In *The Truth in Painting*, the frame or *parergon* of van Gogh's painting is detached. At the same time, the line that goes around the shoes and gives them form is detached: the tracing between the "inside" and the "outside," the external and the internal border, of the shoes is unstable. For Derrida, this is visible in the depiction of the shoelaces: "The frame makes a work of supplementary *désœuvrement*," when it "cuts out" and "sews back together what it divides" in the *traits* of the painting and the different limiting borders inside it.[190] There is thus always instability in the work of art in relation to what belongs to it and what does not. This implies to Derrida that the work is undone, as it is not obvious what is external and what is internal to it; it becomes impossible to say what belongs to its essence and identity or if there is any such thing. This is a fatal question of philosophy.

Apart from the impossibility of limiting the scope of the work or its elements to the end, the motivation for the necessity of deconstructing the concept of the work has to be searched in the limitless possibilities of producing works of art: they are too different to be contained under a single concept. Thus, as Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy have wished to show, a work of art is never only one, never a limited whole in the same way as, for example, Hegel's concepts of "labour" and "work." According to Alexandre Kojève's formulation, in Hegel "[t]he product of work is the worker's production": the realization of his project and of his idea.[191] To the contrary, in the deconstructionist practice, the "work of art" points to an irreducible manifold of works, which come into being according to their different, local contexts, according to the situation.[192]

Why does the "work" need deconstruction that suggests its fundamental unworking, its lack of substance and frame? One of Derrida's motives can be perceived in the will to challenge the belief in the self-presentation of meaning that he calls "logocentrism."[193] In logocentrism, he sees the ideal of the metaphysics of presence in Western culture that already Heidegger has addressed in his critique. The metaphysics of presence refers to the notion that being is understood as self-contained presence, which for Heidegger founded the ontology of the transcendental subject.[194] According to Derrida,

every presence or "now" point is always already compromised by what it cannot hold: a trace, or a residue of a previous experience that prevents us from ever being in a self-contained "now" moment. Even painting or any other work of art does not have full presence, for it is always in excess of meaning. In this respect, it is equal to writing as opposed to "self-present" speech, since between the writer and writing, there is always a distance included. On such grounds, death, distance, and difference are thought to be a corruption of the self-presence of meaning and immediacy.

The self-presence and immediacy of meaning are at stake in Derrida's project that aims at deconstructing the work. Derrida wants to question the idea that any work might be presented as a unified totality that would produce its own essence as work. At least the notion of a total work does not apply to works of philosophy: if their ideas could be compressed in a single, encompassing meaning, they would lose their significance as philosophical treatises. In the place of work, he brings the dissemination of meaning that has neither beginning nor end. Jean-Luc Nancy has deconstructed the work in the context of community, in which human beings have often been defined as producers of their own essence "in the form of their labor or their work," producing this essence *as community*, which Nancy perceives to be the basis of the communist ideal. In this scheme, the essence becomes its own work in the form of "totalitarianism" or "immanentism."[195] By criticizing the work in its various forms, both Nancy and Derrida hope to detach from the metaphysics of the absolute, Hegelian or otherwise. The absoluteness of the absolute becomes now undone, as the logic of the absolute sets the absolute in relation. This relation is the community for Nancy, community that is nothing but what it undoes.[196]

Undoing the work thus leaves us with the deprivation of meaning. Derrida outlines his theory of the "work" and its limits explicitly in his book *Dissemination*. In the essay "Hors livre: Outwork," he approaches the question of the limits of a literary text, of which philosophy appears as a specific genre.[197] The focus of *Dissemination* is to seek what constitutes the inside and outside of any text, literal or otherwise, and its presentation. "Dissemination" that literally points to "sowing," "distribution," and "dispersal," refers to a textual residue that resists being subjectified, appropriated, and idealized; briefly, that resists being internalized in a symbolic order.

Like in *The Truth in Painting* a few years later, in *Dissemination* Derrida takes an interest in the correspondence between the object of inquiry and the relevant concept. This interrogation conducts him to search the limits of a theoretical discourse, where he finds a traditional hierarchical opposition that organizes our understanding of culture. Such dialectical opposition exists between innumerable structures: according to Derrida, these exist between writing and speech, between writing and the logocentric (idealist, spiritualist,

phonocentrist) system of what is customarily opposed to writing, as well as in the Saussurean notion of sign, composed of the signifier and the signified.[198] Such oppositions seem to organize not only most philosophical systems but, in fact, also countless other structures, language included. Despite this, Derrida states that the oppositions have never been constituted an entire given system, but rather a dissymmetric, hierarchically ordered space.

Derrida doubts the possibility of any hermetic system that would present itself as a totality. His aim is hence to deconstruct these oppositions by moving outside the fundamental dialectic that they entail—the dialectic of the same and the other, of the inside and the outside of the text. This shift is implied in the notion of *différance*, which Derrida describes as "movement of the trace that both implies the mark and its erasure [*effacement*]."[199] The erasure refers to the notion that the mark is never entirely adequate to explain its signification in reality, in the "simplicity of a present"—instead, reality appears only "under erasure" (*sous rature*) in the form of trace.[200] Leaving the circle of meaning leads to seeing the space of *différance*, that is, the proliferation of meanings that remains in the margins of any system: in such space, outside the subjective, intended significations in any of text, there exists the possibility of the dispersal of meaning—spacing and interval. This leads to exiting what he deems to be the structuralist circle of production of meanings. In *différance*, the element of self-present meaning—the underlying ideal of Western culture—is destroyed, as there is always distance between the linguistic signifier and what is signified "mentally."[201] In speech, by contrast, the meaning is supposed to be present to itself for the speaker is present to what he or she is saying, while between the writer and writing a distance is included. This entails that art is comparable to writing in that they both are always in excess of meaning, as the author is not present in the work. As a result, the meaning of the author and that of the reader or spectator may not coincide, but there is inevitably an interval whereby the meaning becomes dislocated.[202] Similarly, speech is always already structured by difference and distance as much as writing is, alone for the reason that the contexts of the speaker and the receiver are different.

The notion of the self-presence—for instance, of meaning or speech—expresses the autonomy of the definite concept with respect to the object. In question is the self-sufficiency of the idea: what is essential what is inessential in the object, such as the text in Derrida? Is there a way to limit the object? The inquiry into the loss of self-presence involves asking whether the signified and the signifier can ever fully correspond with each other in the text. For Derrida, there is always the chance that a text includes something that does not completely fit into what it is designed to mean: some features of the text always exceed the premeditated purposes of the writer. On these grounds, Derrida explores whether there is a possibility of presenting any text

as a "totality"—namely as a "work," which would incorporate its meaning without any remainder.[203] Derrida's examples of what may overflow a work are the importance of rhetoric in Plato's *Phaedrus*, as well as Kant's theory of the ornament in art and architecture in the *Critique of Judgment*.[204] Kant's horizon is the essence of "pure art" and "pure beauty." Therefore, the question of the ornament is of interest to Kant and Derrida: how should it serve the ornament bearer? If the ornament is detachable from the aesthetic object "itself," what is this object, and how to define its self-sufficiency?[205]

In exploring the work, rather than on the work itself, Derrida's attention is on the *hors-livre*, the "outwork": the rhetorical remainder or "ornament" of the text. He finds it in what is left from the structure of signification, or from that which cannot be reduced to unity. The reason for Derrida's focusing on "the rests" of the work is that, as he sees it, the notion of the work is not suited for speculation: language and reality do not correspond with each other without remainder. Between them, there is always a gap: a distance, spacing, *khôra*, or *différance*.[206] Binary oppositions and hierarchies are examples of this difference because it is not possible to dialectically sublate its terms into a third term, nor can the two sides be derived from any primary simplicity.

In addition to philosophical presentation and discourse, the loss of ideal form is present in Derrida's thinking of the literary work and the painting. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant posits the limits of a painting by defining what is part of their "discourse" and what makes only an addition to their "true" content—the subject of the painting; what in a painting constitutes an element of the self-presence of the concept and existence.[207] The question concerns, on the one hand, the identity and, on the other, the *limits* of identity, which in Derrida's view are constantly subjected to dissemination. This is a state of existence where the meaning is never one, but the text always refers to other texts and thus generates new meanings and associations. Dissemination takes place on the threshold, *limen*, of the text.[208] Derrida aims to suggest that what has been judged to form a complete, definite system appears to be more porous and exposed to other texts than philosophers—Hegel as a primary example—have wished to admit.

The thought of dissemination stems from the context of philosophy and other literary texts.[209] In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida experiments on the idea of the painting as disseminating text. Like literature, he proposes that the painting cannot be identified with its "subject," nor is it clear what the "real" subject is or how it should be limited. This is the case of Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Lucretia* and likewise of van Gogh's *Old Shoes with Laces*. To bring forward the question of the loss of the immanence and the incontestable substance of a work, we find ourselves compelled to confront with the thought that any work includes material that is in controversial relation to what the

work seems to be "about." Therefore, Derrida and other deconstructive philosophers have introduced the notion that it is finally impossible to say what and where the work "is."

The notion of *désœuvrement* suggests that we never encounter work as a limited whole, which would allow us to grasp any "total picture" of a thing. Instead, any work, the work of art included, points to its outside: to the artist, to other artists, artistic styles and periods, themes, to the phenomena of the world. Therefore, Derrida's relevant question is: what does it mean to be a work, without the thought of a self-enclosed totality? How is it possible to decide of the limits of the work of art? Inversely, what do we call a "work of art," and how do we meet the influence of its unavoidable and proliferating contexts? In especially Derrida, the "work of art" remains an open concept. It follows that the signification of the "work of art" must be defined anew in different eras and contexts: also, the content of what is referred to by the work of art proves to be undecidable. In fact, what we understand by the "work" is defined and decided of each time when a new work of art is created and encountered. On the one hand, in theories of modern and contemporary visual arts, one can hardly discern any encompassing conditions and characteristics that would suffice to give something the name and value of the "work of art."[210]

In a similar fashion, one has to ask how to decide of the work of art *as* work of art; of painting *as* painting.[211] This is a decision that touches the limit where nothing would potentially remain of painting than its mere exposure and its bare name—that is, the singularity of the painting.

Derrida and Nancy alike have put into a thorough doubt the possibility of speaking of the transcendental essence of the "work of art" in general; its concept is now disseminated. Instead of being a presentation of a universal idea, art means rather a disjunction of heterogeneous aspects, which, however, are not fragments of a larger, definable entity.[212] For deconstructionist thinkers, every singular work of art is, from the beginning, only a partial, specific singular aspect of what one may conceive as a work of art.

Derrida begins his inquiry from the supposition that a single work of art is never able to offer us a unified conception of art nor represent it as a whole. A singular work is not one but multiple and discontinuous: it has always more aspects than appears in any single event of its reception or in any interpretation, not even in their totality.[213] Of importance is not what the thing, such as art, in itself really *is*. The idea that we cannot know this corresponds to Kant's philosophy, for according to him, we cannot have knowledge of the noumenal world or of the thing-in-itself, but only of the world of phenomena.[214] In Derrida, what we may know is how art appears to us according to the variable and diverse conditions that surround it. The significance of the context resonates with his larger thought according to which things are

lacking a shared and immutable identity, such as a clear-cut, manageable "work."[215]

NOTES

1. The significance of the work of art is a widely researched subject especially within the tradition of Analytical philosophy of art of the twentieth century.

2. Peter Brunette and David Wills, *Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989), 103.

3. Jean-Luc Nancy, "Éloquentes rayures," in *Derrida et la question de l'art*, ed. Adnen Jdey (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2011), 18–19.

4. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 22 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 26); see also Craig Owens, "Detachment from the *parergon*," *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 43–45.

5. Nancy, "Éloquentes rayures," 17.

6. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 11 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 15–16).

7. Cf. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 137 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 157).

8. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 169 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 253: "La parole soufflée"); Ginette Michaud, *Jacques Derrida: L'art du contretemps* (Montréal: Nota Bene, 2014; henceforth cited as *L'art du contretemps*), 264; Serge Trottein, "Pour une esthétique des *parerga*: lire Derrida avec Kant," in *Derrida et la question de l'art*, ed. Adnen Jdey (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2011), 242–243.

9. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 163; also 198, 341 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 185, 213, 389).

10. Nancy, "Éloquentes rayures," 18.

11. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 155 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 209).

12. Ann Van Sevenant, "Le disjoint fait œuvre," in *Jacques Derrida et l'esthétique*, ed. Nathalie Roelens (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

13. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 167 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 192). See also Van Sevenant, "Le disjoint fait œuvre," esp. 79–82.

14. See Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 250ff.

15. This question is treated particularly in *The Truth in Painting*, where Derrida examines the boundaries in discourses on art, in specific in Kantian and Heideggerian philosophy of art.

16. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 9–11 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 14–16).

17. Trottein, "Pour une esthétique des *parerga*," 251.

18. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 253–256.

19. See *The Truth in Painting*, esp. 255–382 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 291–436).

20. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 27, 35–36. See also Michael Kelly, *Iconoclasm in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 35–36.

21. Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Joyce, Husserl, Derrida ou comment œuvrer à l'infini," in *Derrida et la question de l'art*, ed. Adnen Jdey (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2011), 68; cf. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 219.

22. It is possible to inquire, however, whether Kant does "research in aesthetics" either: for Kant, the judgment of beauty is not grounded in a concept, which makes

one ask if it is possible to do conceptual research of it. Vincent Houillon, "Derrida et l'intraitable *épochè* de l'œuvre d'art," in *Derrida et la question de l'art*, ed. Adnen Jdey (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2011), 281.

23. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting."

24. Anne Ring Petersen, "Introduction," in *Contemporary Painting in Context*, eds. Anne Ring Petersen et al. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2010), 9ff.

25. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 11 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 14).

26. Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent," 300–301.

27. See Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 209–271 ("White Mythology," orig. 1971; *Marges de la philosophie*, 247–324).

28. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 209 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 247).

29. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 219–221 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 261–263).

30. Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles / Éperons: Les styles de Nietzsche* (1978), bilingual edition, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 37.

31. For Jean-Luc Nancy's account of the ontology of art, see *The Muses*, esp. 1–39 ("Why Are There Several Arts, And Not Just One?").

32. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 247–248.

33. Duve, Thierry de, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 147–159.

34. Heidegger's critique of the "metaphysics of presence" in *Being and Time* offers a perspective to this question.

35. See Houillon, "Derrida et l'intraitable *épochè* de l'œuvre d'art," 296.

36. See Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 250ff.

37. See Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 162–163 (orig. *Échographies de la télévision*, Paris: Galilée, 1996).

38. Lyotard cites painter Valerio Adami who, in turn, quotes Diderot: "To paint as one spoke in Sparta"; and "Diderot said that paintings are like great mutes: they disavow in advance all that is written of them." Jean-François Lyotard, *Que peindre? / What to Paint?: Adami, Arakawa, Buren*, ed. Herman Parret, trans. Antony Hudek, Vlad Ionescu and Peter W. Milne (Leuven: Leuven UP, 1987/2012), 187, 189.

39. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 1–13, 282 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 5–18, 322).

40. See, for example, Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, 165–166. Here Bernard Stiegler points out that although there is an irreducible difference between "the mental image" and "the image-object" in Derrida, this difference is not, however, an opposition.

41. Cf. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 2 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 6).

42. For an analysis of Derrida's critique of phenomenology and the paradigm of the visible in the context of visual arts, see Éliane Escoubas, "Derrida et la vérité du dessin: une autre révolution copernicienne?," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 53, no. 1 (2007): 47–59.

43. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 70 (*La dissémination*, 79); cf. *The Truth in Painting*, 222 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 254–255).

44. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 17–19.

45. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

46. Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 150 ("Is Painting a Language?," 1969).

47. The concepts of text, spacing, and *différance* will be explained more to the detail elsewhere in this book. See also Melville, "Color Has Not Yet Been Named," 34.

48. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 63 (*La dissémination*, 71).

49. Cf. Galard, "L'œuvre exappropriée," 85.

50. In this sense, Derrida's view seems to be in contrast with modern hermeneutics, in which problems of interpretation of texts are problems of understanding, as proposed first by Friedrich Schleiermacher. See Spariosu, "Mimesis and Contemporary French Theory," 67.

51. Melville, "Color Has Not Yet Been Named," 43–44.

52. Melville, "Color Has Not Yet Been Named," 40.

53. See Melville, "Color Has Not Yet Been Named," 34; cf. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*.

54. Escoubas, "Derrida et la vérité du dessin," 57.

55. Nancy, *The Muses*, esp. 81–100 ("The Vestige of Art"); *The Sense of the World*, esp. 123–139 ("Art, a Fragment"; *Le sens du monde*, 189–212); cf. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* and *Penser à ne pas voir*.

56. Nancy, *The Muses*, 27 (*Les Muses*, 52). For Heidegger, the original meaning of *techne* is a bringing forth (*Hervorbringen*) or uncovering of beings out of concealedness. Heidegger translates also *poiesis* by *Hervorbringen*, whereas the more traditional meanings of *poiesis* are "making" and "producing." See Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 59; cf. Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1998), 259 ("Letter on 'Humanism,' " trans. Frank A. Capuzzi).

57. The influence of Hegel is particularly perceptible in several essays by Jean-Luc Nancy, published especially in *The Muses* and *Le poids d'une pensée* (Strasbourg: La Phocide, 2008/1991), 37–64 ("Portrait de l'art en jeune fille").

58. "Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg [Novalis]." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed January 28, 2021, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/novalis/#FraPhiFor.

59. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 206–208 (*La dissémination*, 234–237).

60. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 43 (orig. *L'absolu littéraire*, Paris: Seuil, 1978, 63). For "fragmentation," Nancy gives the synonyms "spacing," "exposition," "piecework" and "exhaustion," as well as "fracturing," "fraying," "wounding," and "shattering," among others. The thinking of fragmented art is based on the idea that "our art, thought, and text are in ruin"—in question is "a flight from the event and its truth" (ibid.).

61. See also, Melville, "Color Has Not Yet Been Named," 36–37. In this context, I shall not go to the meaning of "truth" in any remarkable length. As a general notion, Derrida states that propositional truth requires fiction—"truth of truth." Truth works in constatives: the speaker commits himself to truth in making assertions. Yet, despite this, Derrida does not deny the difference between truth and falsity, nor does he claim that there is no relation between language and reality or that sentences can be taken to mean whatever we want, as extreme relativists might do.

62. See Nancy, *The Muses* and *passim.*

63. Institutional criticism refers to the inquiry into the working of art institutions, the critique of the art world or the social institutions of art, sociological and political criticism as it appears in the recent writings of Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Bruno Latour, to mention a few examples. See *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*, eds. Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (London: MayFly Books, 2009).

64. One may think of here, for example, the Analytic tradition of aesthetics, in which the methods of linguistic analysis are brought to bear on aesthetics. Such treatment has included the analysis of concepts, philosophy of language and mind, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Within the discipline of aesthetics, Analytic accounts may draw on a variety of domains, such as conceptual analysis, representation, meaning, reference, metaphysics and ontology, truth and knowledge, ethics and value. The most prominent philosophers in this tradition have been Monroe C. Beardsley, Frank Sibley, and Arthur Danto. See Peter Lamarque, "Analytic Aesthetics," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Michael Beaney (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 770–794.

65. Andreas Papadakis et al., eds., *Deconstruction: Omnibus Volume* (London: Academy Editions, 1989), 77.

66. See Derrida's extensive discussion of the notion of ornament in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in *The Truth in Painting*, 17–147 ("Parergon").

67. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 24 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 28–29). In the current use of language, the *hors d'œuvres* refer to appetizers or dishes served before a meal. Derrida plays with the literal meaning of the expression: that which is outside of the work.

68. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 54 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 63). In the search for the cause or the knowledge of principles, Derrida reminds, one must avoid letting the *parerga* get the upper hand over the essentials. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a30.

69. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 54 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 63). As for the etymology of the *à-bord*, in Middle High German *bort* means table, plank, deck of a vessel. As Émile Littré's dictionary of the French language suggests, by metonymy, *à bord* is that which borders, that which encloses, that which limits, that which is at the extremity. For Derrida, the bord is made of wood, and apparently indifferent like the frame of a painting. Wood names matter, for *hyle* means "wood." These questions of wood, of matter, of the frame, of the limit between inside and outside, must, somewhere in the margins, be constituted together. Wood as the support or frame exists very literally in paintings both as decorative frames for works on display, but also as

the supporting frame over which the canvas is stretched. Wood as the model for matter feels very relevant today also as it shows that matter is not lifeless homogeneity, but rather displays tendencies and potentialities that the craftsman or -woman must know to work it properly according to one's goal.

70. See Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 8–9 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 376–377) ("Signature, Event, Context").

71. Derrida characterizes dissemination as follows: it is "the critique of the transcendental signified in all its forms; deconstruction, the displacement and subordination of effects of sense or reference along with all that would preside over any logocentric, expressivist, mimetological concept and practice of writing; the reconstruction of the textual field out of the workings of intertextuality or of infinite referral from trace to trace." Derrida, *Dissemination*, 43 (*La dissémination*, 50).

72. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 35–36 (*La dissémination*, 42–43).

73. See, for example, Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 31ff.

74. See Barbara Johnson, "Translator's Introduction," in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (1972), trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), xxxii.

75. Johnson, "Translator's Introduction," xxxii.

76. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 5–7 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 9–12).

77. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 77, 71.

78. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 45 (*La dissémination*, 51); Derrida, "Reste – le maître ou le supplément d'infini," *Le genre humain* 37 (avril 2002): 41.

79. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 15 (*La dissémination*, 21).

80. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 7 (*La dissémination*, 13).

81. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 16 (*La dissémination*, 22).

82. Jacques Derrida, *Khôra* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 46–47. The *khôra* is a term employed by Plato in *Timaeus*, in which it appears as "invisible" and is without a "sensuous" form. Thus, for Plato, the *khôra* is a "third kind" (*triton genos*): an interval and a space between things, their material substratum. Plato, *Timaeus*, 48e4, 52a; Derrida, *Khôra*, 15ff.

83. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 12–13 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 12–14).

84. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 13 (*La dissémination*, 18).

85. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 15, note 17 (*La dissémination*, 21, note 10).

86. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 33 (*La dissémination*, 39–40); see also Johnson, "Translator's Introduction," xiii.

87. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 7 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 7).

88. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1968), 248 (*Le Visible et l'invisible*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964, 301).

89. Benjamin Riado, "La philosophie en peinture: une déconstruction derridienne de l'esthétique," in *La pensée comme expérience: Esthétique et deconstruction*, eds. Vangelis Athanassopoulos and Marc Jimenez (Paris: La Sorbonne, 2016), 95. As Benjamin Riado points out (p. 96), apart from the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant uses the term *parergon* also in the *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (1793). In a wider scheme, the *parergon* is connected with the topics of oppositions and hierarchies in Derrida, which derive from Plato's philosophy, among other sources. Cf. Jacques

Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41–42 (*Positions*, Paris: Minuit, 1972, 55–56). See also Plato, *Timaeus*, 38d6–e1.

90. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 42–43 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 50–51).

91. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 76 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 88).

92. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 69–70 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 81–82). As Derrida remarks, the Kantian analytic of the aesthetic judgment itself allows us to define what is required of formality as well as what counts as the opposition between the formal and the material, or between the pure and the impure, the proper and the improper and the inside and the outside. As a result, the very analytic is able to determine the frame as *parergon*. It both constitutes and ruins the analytic, which is to say that the *parergon* makes it both hold and collapse. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 73 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 85).

93. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 82 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 94); see Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, "Clarification by Examples" (§ 14) in the "Analytic of the Beautiful," book 1 of the "Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment."

94. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 42 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 50). For Derrida, Kant's work has a "lacunary character" (*Mangelhaftigkeit*).

95. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 73 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 85). For Derrida, the "truth" of the frame, however, can no longer be a "truth," for it no more defines the transcendentality than it does the accidentality of the frame, merely its parergonality. Deconstruction must neither reframe nor dream of the pure and simple absence of the frame. These two apparently contradictory gestures are the very ones—and they are systematically indissociable—of what is here deconstructed. It is worth noticing that the expression "of what is here deconstructed" (in French, "de ce qui se déconstruit") contains passive and reflexive values at the same time.

96. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 81 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 93).

97. Riado, "La philosophie en peinture," 95.

98. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 1 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 5).

99. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 2 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 6).

100. On the problem of the decision and undecidability of existence, or the ungroundedness of being, see Jean-Luc Nancy, esp. *The Birth to Presence*, ed. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993), 82–109 (*Une pensée finie*, Paris: Galilée, 1990, 107–145).

101. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 55 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 63).

102. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 56 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 65).

103. Stephen Melville, "Counting / As / Painting," in Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon & Stephen Melville, *As Painting: Division and Displacement* (Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press, 2000), 1.

104. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 9–10 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 13–15). Derrida attempts to combine the phonic *trait* to the so-called graphic *trait*, which exists even before any word—it has to do with the letter and the proper name *in painting*, with the painterly elements: narration, technical reproduction, ideology, the phoneme, the biographeme, politics, and the like. In later passages of *The Truth in Painting*, the opportunity is given by *The Journey of the Drawing* by Valerio Adami.

105. Derrida, "Economimesis."

106. See, for example, Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, 3–27.

107. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 59–60 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 69).

108. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 57 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 66).

109. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 14.

110. Nancy, "Éloquentes rayures," 18–19. For Nancy, the relation between the senses and art proves complex. None of the arts is the product of a single sense, so that music would be related to hearing and painting to seeing. Instead, art is either "unique and beyond the senses," or the distribution of the different sense(s) is the product of art itself. In the latter case, the distribution of the senses would form an "aesthetic circle," defined by an intrinsic diversity called "sense." *The Muses*, 10–11 (*Les Muses*, 26–27).

111. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 58–59 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 67–69).

112. From the point of view of the limits of the human body and its supplementary parts and organs, one may refer to Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of the prosthesis. According to Nancy, it may *not* be clear what belongs "originally" to the human body. See Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (Fordham: Fordham UP, 2008), 87–93 (*Corpus*, Paris: Métailié, 1992, 77–81) and *L'Intrus* (Paris: Galilée, 2000); "The Intruder," in *Corpus* (English translation), 161–170.

113. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 3 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 7).

114. The speech act theory was developed by philosopher J. L. Austin (1911–1960). It concerns the fact that not all forms of language are such that they would be primarily intended to deliver information about the world, or to declare a state of things like constatives do. In addition to these, there is use of language whose end is in the utterance of the words itself, such as swearing or promise. These performatives refer only to their own utterance, they are *making* things happen rather than description of states of affairs and the fact that they are pronounced is part of some action. Thus, these kinds of words are neither true nor false in themselves.

115. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 4–5 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 8–9).

116. However, Derrida is not alone in this thought. According to Maurice Blanchot, one cannot make an image of language: there are no definite meanings in language in the sense that it would be possible to control linguistic meanings. See, for example, Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997), 32.

117. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 6 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 10–11).

118. In question here is a "strife" that opens up above the gap between "earth" and "world" and keeps the opposing edges together. The truth thus disclosed in art is an event: the "setting-into-work of truth." See Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 47–48, 72; for French translation, see "L'origine de l'œuvre d'art," in Heidegger, *Chemins qui ne mènent nulle part*, trans. Wolfgang Brokmeier (Paris: Gallimard, 1962).

119. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 7–8 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 11–12).

120. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 59 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 69).

121. Riado, "La philosophie en peinture," 96.

122. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 60 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 69).

123. As Derrida underlines, *traits* start by retreating themselves: an incision or cut is born that will leave a trace, but does not present itself as the beginning of anything.

124. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 9 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 14: "J'écris ici quatre fois, *autour* de la peinture.").

125. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 11 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 15).

126. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 344 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 393).

127. Trottein, "Pour une esthétique des *parerga*," 251.

128. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 57 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 66).

129. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 63 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 74: "Le jugement esthétique *doit* porter proprement sur la beauté intrinsèque, non sur les atours et les abords.").

130. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 14.

131. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 81 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 93). According to Derrida, structuralism holds the same principle of disinterestedness: finality that is not related to any end (p. 82).

132. Cf. Kant's distinction between the noumenal or intelligible world and the phenomenal world or the world of appearances in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781); Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (1967); "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, 3–27 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 1–29).

133. Spariosu, "Mimesis and Contemporary French Theory," 65.

134. "De ce qui à jamais le cadre, ne peut au juste que partir." Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, "Starting Out from the Frame (Vignettes)," trans. Lynne E. Johnson, in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts*, eds. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 140.

135. Lebensztejn, "Starting Out from the Frame (Vignettes)," 118.

136. Derrida, "Economimesis," 16–17.

137. Philip Armstrong, "Impossibilities: Painting Between Jean-François Lyotard and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe," in *French Theory and American Art*, eds. Anaël Lejeune, Olivier Mignon and Raphaël Pirenne (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 283; see also Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove, 1984), 138–145.

138. Armstrong, "Impossibilities," 283.

139. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 22 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 26).

140. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 22–23 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 26–27).

141. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 61 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 71).

142. In Derrida's opinion, neither "theory," "practice," nor "theoretical practice" can interfere with art if it is not involved with the frame. The frame delimits the meanings of art, while the frame itself is invisible. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 61 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 71).

143. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 61 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 73).

144. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 63 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 73).

145. Cf. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 59 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 69).

146. For this discussion, see Trottein, "Pour une esthétique des *parerga*," 254–258 and Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 209.

147. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 372 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 425–426); Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 209. See also Antonioli, "À la limite, le toucher," 456, and Jérôme de Gramont, "Par quelle offrande sans nom? Derrida, Kant et la phénoménologie du tableau," in *Derrida et la question de* l'art, ed. Adnen Jdey (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2011), 274. Cit. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps,* 212–213.

148. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 38; § 60, 342; § 68, 394.

149. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 274–275 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 312–313). For the state of "abandonment" of the work of art, cf. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 215 ("Extase, crise").

150. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 291 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 332); Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 64, 367.

151. See Aristotle, *Physics* and *Metaphysics*.

152. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 292 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 333).

153. See Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 337–363 ("Kant's Thesis about Being").

154. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 46–47.

155. On the matter of the ground, see also Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 1–14 ("The Image—The Distinct"; orig. "L'image—le distinct," *Au fond des images*, 11–32).

156. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 301–304 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 344–347).

157. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 303 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 346).

158. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 127–128 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 145–146).

159. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 63 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 74).

160. Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, 79–81 (*Le poids d'une pensée*, 8–10); cf. François Raffoul, "Translator's Preface," in Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press), xxviii–xxxi. On being understood as "ekstatic," see Heidegger, *Being and Time,* §§ 5–6.

161. Hegel, *Aesthetics I*, 1–14; Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 17–19.

162. Derrida points out, however, that this question has "no coincidence" with the fact that Heidegger's essay has the same name. *The Truth in Painting*, 20 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 24).

163. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 21 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 25).

164. For the concept of "grand narrative," see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984).

165. See Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 54–55 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 63–64).

166. See Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 212–245 ("La parole soufflée") and 292–316 ("The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation"). These texts focus on Artaud's literary and theatrical activities.

167. Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres complètes* XI (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 20.

168. Jacques Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," trans. Mary Ann Caws, *Yale French Studies* 84 (1994): Boundaries: Writing & Drawing, ed. M. Reid, 170–171. This text forms a part of Derrida's article "Forcener le Subjectile" (1986), translated in entirety as "To Unsense the Subjectile," in Jacques Derrida and Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 61–157. I refer here to the concise version, "Maddening the Subjectile," in which Derrida presents his argument in a compact form.

169. Paule Thévenin, "The Search for a Lost World," trans. Mary Ann Caws, in Jacques Derrida and Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, 22.

170. Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," 154.

171. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 131; see also Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 244–245.

172. Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," 154–159.

173. Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," 167.

174. Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, 345–350.

175. Derrida, "To Unsense the Subjectile," 123.

176. Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," 159.

177. Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," 161.

178. Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," 163.

179. Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," 170.

180. Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," 164–165.

181. Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," 171.

182. Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," 165.

183. Foucault, "What Is the Author?"; Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 142–148 ("The Death of the Author," orig. "La mort de l'auteur," 1968, in Roland Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue: Essais critiques IV*, Paris: Seuil, 1984, 63–69).

184. Ian Chilvers and John Glaves-Smith, *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art*, Second Edition (Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 45–46.

185. André Breton, "From the First Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), in *Art in Theory 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 438.

186. Derrida, "To Unsense the Subjectile," 106; Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres complètes* XXI (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 266–267, cit. Derrida.

187. Derrida, "To Unsense the Subjectile," 103.

188. See André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen A. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969).

189. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 303 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 346). In commentaries of Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art," the painting by van Gogh to which Heidegger supposedly refers is often called *Old Peasant Shoes*. Jean-Luc Nancy has written extensively on the theme of *désœuvrement* in *The Inoperative Community*; see this book for the various translations, "unworking" and "inoperativeness" among others. In the background of Nancy's treatise of unworking exists an extensive discussion that originates especially from Maurice Blanchot's book *The Unavowable Community* (1983), trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown: Station Hill, 1988); also Georges Bataille, *The Impossible* (1962), trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1991).

190. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 304 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 346–347: "le cadre fait œuvre de désœuvrement supplémentaire").

191. Kojève, Alexandre, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980), 24–25 (orig. *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 1947).

192. In phenomenological theories, each work shows different faces of itself according to its "horizon" or the conditions of experience, as defined by Edmund Husserl. The horizon may depend on site of installation, light conditions, and the nature of other works in the vicinity, as well as the spectator's subjective expectations and abilities of reception. Steven Crowell, "Phenomenology and Aesthetics; or, Why Art Matters," in *Art and Phenomenology*, ed. Joseph D. Parry (London: Routledge, 2011), esp. 34–39.

193. Johnson, "Translator's Introduction," ix.

194. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 62 (*La voix et le phénomène*, 69).

195. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 2–3 (*La Communauté désœuvrée*, 13–16).

196. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 4 (*La Communauté désœuvrée*, 18). Nancy cites Georges Bataille: "to see God but in the same instant kill him, then become God himself but only to rush straightway into nothingness." Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 547. Cit. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 5 (*La Communauté désœuvrée*, 19).

197. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 1–59 (*La dissémination*, 9–67).

198. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 5 (*La dissémination*, 10–11).

199. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 5 (*La dissémination*, 11).

200. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 66 (*De la grammatologie*, 96–97).

201. Johnson, "Translator's Introduction," ix.

202. See Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*.

203. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 45 (*La dissémination*, 53).

204. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, ch. "Parergon."

205. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §§ 3, 42 (A50, A177).

206. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 25 (*La dissémination*, 31–32).

207. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 12 (*La dissémination*, 18).

208. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 16 (*La dissémination*, 22).

209. Like Derrida, in the 1970s, Nancy seized upon the idea to read philosophical works as literary presentations. Both Derrida and Nancy remarked that philosophy is an instance of a specific kind of literature and constructed according to certain rules. Thus, philosophical presentation may be deconstructed by reading it as literature. See *Le discours de la syncope* (1976), in which Nancy discusses Kant, and *Ego sum* (1979), where he writes of René Descartes's philosophical presentation.

210. Cf. Nancy, *The Muses*, 1–39 (*Les Muses*, 11–70).

211. Armstrong, "Impossibilities," 282.

212. Van Sevenant, "Le disjoint fait œuvre," 73.

213. The analyses of artworks in the collection *Penser à ne pas voir* offer insights into this question. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*.

214. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), for example A254/B310, 362: "The concept of a noumenon, i.e., of a thing that is not to be thought of as an object of the senses but rather as a thing-in-itself."

215. Jean-Luc Nancy's solution is to address the "work of art" from the angle of its finitude. In the thinking of finitude of being, Nancy follows many of Heidegger's

ideas as presented in *Being and Time*. In Heidegger, being is finite, for being "is" only insofar as *Dasein* exists in its finitude, according to its potentiality-for-being. See *Being and Time*, § 9. Nancy's view is that being is finite, since there is being only insofar as *Dasein* exists, and *Dasein* exists according to its finite, particular possibilities. Finite—in other words, infinitely open—existence takes place infinitely. For Nancy, *Dasein* and other beings, namely works of art, share the same way of coming into presence and existing as events of a finite truth, with the difference that the "truth" could be best termed as their finite sense. Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, 1–6, cf. 82–109 (*Une pensée finie*, 107–145).

Chapter 4

The *Trait* and Difference

Art between Form and Gesture

Among Derrida's fields of inquiry, drawing forms perhaps the most cohesive area of interest among the different arts. His account of drawing can be called deconstructive in several ways: contrary to many traditional views, Derrida aims at breaking with two general assumptions that for him form the basis for many conceptions of drawing. According to the first one, drawing offers an image of the world as we see it, depicting either existing figures or ideas; according to the second, there is a self-evident connection between the human vision and the image. Derrida undoes these ideas and especially the notion that drawing could imitate visible reality: for him, drawing rather eludes reality and vision.[1]

In aesthetic theories exists a long-standing tradition of speaking about the concept of line in art. According to many theories, the line is part of the aesthetics of forms: the line shapes, modifies, and animates artistic material and gives it a figure that exists in nature or in the artist's mind. Since Antiquity, theories of art have strived to draw a sharp line between form and matter, between the supersensible idea or concept and its more or less equivalent sensuous realization in art. This configuration is based upon the mimetic conception of art, that is, art as the imitation of nature, truth or idea, a preexisting spiritual entity. Such thinking is based upon differentiation between the inside and the outside, the idea and its sensible appearance, or between the substance or essence and its transformation, deplacement, or alteration into a perceptible figure. As Jean-Luc Nancy has put it, the goal of traditional theories is to make the one into the other: to modulate the other into the sphere of the same.[2] Thus, line would be the artistic means of producing this transformation. To be inquired is how Derrida's philosophy of drawing is intended to deconstruct all these principles: the distinction between form and matter, the intelligible and the sensuous, and drawing as mimetic action.

In the history of art, drawings have either presented an "independent" form of art or served as sketches and designs for other artworks, such as paintings and sculptures.[3] Drawing differs from printmaking in that the drawings are realized directly on paper or some kind of surface, while in prints there in general always exists a break between the matrix and the print.[4] In broader terms, drawing has a special position in showing how the relation between the inside and the outside in art is constituted. The differentiation between form and matter originated in Plato's theory of ideas and received its highest formulations in Hegel's philosophy of art. The art of drawing has appeared to be of particular importance in considering the relationship between the intangible form of art and the material figure: the act of drawing shows how matter or the perceptible trace that results from the artist's work is structured and shaped in works of art. Derrida opposes such conception, which is based on the differentiation between matter and form. His notion of drawing nevertheless relates to theories of traditional aesthetics in that he sees drawing to be an ability to produce pictures.

What is drawing, then? Instead of seeing figures in drawing, Derrida departs from the idea that drawing escapes what we see and how we conventionally understand the correspondence between the subject and the object in art. Rather than being a representation of a thing, the source of drawing is difference that takes place within the drawing. Its elements are inherent in the drawn traces, which reach beyond any preconceived figure, either linguistic or visual. How to describe the interest that Derrida takes in the traces, if it is not foreign to his notion of the *trait* and its connection with writing, as well as to the graphic and *différance*?

THE TRAITS OF DRAWING: THE INVISIBLE CONDITION OF THE VISIBLE

The most important theoretical concept in Derrida's theory of drawing is the *trait*. The French word *trait* has an array of meanings: it refers to trait and feature, line, stroke, mark, tracing, character, outline, and trace.[5] The *trait* has a particular significance for the ontology of drawing, which depends on how we shall understand the meaning of the *trait*. Here, Derrida offers two alternatives. First, the word *trait* may either refer to "line," in the sense of a visible mark left on a concrete ground or any kind of support. The second alternative is to conceive of the *trait* as the invisible, transcendental schema behind any kind of trace. The "line" suggests the visible and concrete result of the draughtsman's work, whereas the *trait*, when understood as "trace," never has a visible appearance as such. The *trait* is Derrida's key concept in his writings on drawing. Very often, it oscillates between the two alternatives,

the visible line and the invisible graphic trace, leaving the meaning of the *trait* deliberately ambiguous. The graphic *traits* always exist in tension: between vision and memory, the visible and the invisible, eye and hand, figure and line (*dessin*) and idea (*dessein*).[6]

The two intertwined meanings of the *trait* are the line and the possibility of graphic inscription, namely the possibility of leaving a trace. These two senses are not entirely distinguishable, though: the *trait* as an abstract idea of leaving a trace is hardly thinkable without the existence of a concrete drawing and the lines that it consists of. This is to say that the conceptual and the concrete *traits* are not simply each other's oppositions, nor is their relation hierarchical: the *trait* as a possibility of leaving traces does not precede the perceptible line or the existence of a work of art. In this respect, the ambiguity that Derrida finds in the concept of the *trait* is connected with his scheme of writing. "Writing" may point to "arche-writing," the process of infinite referral and of never arriving at meaning itself, and to the *grammē*: point, line, trace, or letter.[7] It can also point to the concrete realization of arche-writing, namely writing as written language.[8] Without written language, there would be no such thing as arche-writing that designates the condition of the possibility of writing and all inscription.

How does Derrida understand the connection between writing and drawing that consists of traits? The most obvious answer is that in writing and the *trait* alike, the metaphysical dualisms are suspended. Among such dualities are presence and absence, signifier and signified, prior and derivative, inside and outside, as well as identity and difference.[9] In a similar manner, the *trait* implies simultaneous difference and sameness between the line and its abstract possibility. The *trait* thus divides itself all the time: it is the invisible transcendental condition of the existence of art and a visible trace on the surface of the work. The *trait* becomes actualized in the act of drawing a line, or it may remain only as a possibility of drawing such a line. Thus, the *trait* is the possibility of existence of the work of art, regardless of whether the work exists in reality or not. It has therefore an affinity with Derrida's notion of speech: like speech, the *trait* exists "in a certain 'unheard' sense," as potentiality.[10]

In its double sense of being both the invisible and perceptible possibility of all meanings of art, Derrida's *trait* is comparable to the concept of *Riss* that Heidegger introduces in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. *Riss* has been translated as "rift" in English and as "trait" in French.[11] It is the invisible difference between what Heidegger calls "the world" and "the earth." The world is the realm of culture and all human relations, activity, and consciousness, while the earth is the realm of nature, animals, and rock and the like. Earth exists beyond human historical time, and is not mastered by human choices. These two realms are related in taking two opposing sides of truth

as *aletheia*, "unconcealedness." The twofoldness (*Zwiefalt*) of truth itself as *aletheia*, concealing and unconcealing at once, is thus set to the work as the rift between earth and world, in other words, the material and the signifying dimension of the work.[12] The work of art is what creates this rift or chasm through the partially unconcealed earth and the partially concealed world. As the rift emerges in the work, the truth of the work comes as "from nothing."[13] Heidegger uses the famous example of van Gogh's painting of *Peasant Shoes*—or *Old Shoes with Laces*, as the painting is called in Derrida's *Truth in Painting*—to show that the work has to be understood as the setting up of a world in opposition to an earth.[14]

Being the condition of difference, the *trait* is neither intelligible nor sensible, but rather, it is indefinable: it never appears, never itself, never for a first time. Rather, the *trait* "begins by retrac(t)ing [*se retirer*]."[15] What is the process of retracing at play in the *trait*? The *trait* is graphic in the sense of pictorial as it works as the condition of visibility. Yet, the *trait* is nothing visible as such: it is a differential act that results from the act of drawing itself; in concrete terms, from leaving marks on the ground, for instance. For Derrida, this is the origin of the origin.[16] It does not initiate anything but opens the space of drawing with a trace.

A similar multiplication is at work in the *trait* and Heidegger's "rift." Like the "rift," the *trait* divides itself "in the place where it takes place," but it does not have any *topos*; it is the *passe-partout*.[17] *Riss* or rift is a conflict between the two opponents, the earth and the world. At the same time, it is their intimate unity in which the material and the signification of the work of art belong together, having a common ground.[18] In Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art*, rift names a limit (*Grenze*) in the sense of "outline," of which he also uses the Greek concept of *peras*: "end," "limit" and "boundary." The opposite of *peras* is *apeiron*, having the meanings of "unlimited," "boundless," "infinite."[19] *Peras* implies experiment and hence "going beyond form." It has an ontological power of the "not": of exceeding the dialectics between presence and absence. In this scheme, rift signals the event of decision that is, however, left undecided in art; therefore, its event is outside of permanent presence.[20] The *trait* is not an object, not even a concept; it rather appears to be an operation that is comparable to the *forma formans*, "form in formation," the self-giving form.[21]

On such a basis, Heidegger's rift seems to share some important characteristics with Derrida's *trait*. Rift is the invisible difference that makes art and any work of art possible: the way in which art appears as meaningful is bound to its material being, while the meanings and interpretations of art are not reducible to the material dimension only. The two sides of the work, the concrete appearance of the object and the abstract signification, are related differently in each work of art. It appears that both the *trait* and the

Heideggerian rift have therefore a function in creating a union between the two heterogeneous elements of art.[22]

In Derrida's theory of drawing, the *trait* holds primarily a differentiating function. Within a drawing, the *trait* has a potency of tracing. As such, the *trait* is transcendental: it does not belong to any particular drawing but to all possible drawings. Thus, the *trait* in the abstract meaning conveys the sense of the "originary pathbreaking" (*frayage*), which for Derrida is "the moment of the graphic act."[23] That the *trait* is graphic includes its being differential: the *trait* creates differences and makes things discernible. The ability to create differences is what Derrida means by his notion of *graphein*, which generally refers to repeatable signs or inscriptions.[24] The concept of inscription includes that all products of the culture are formed of repeatable texts and images that refer to each other and thus have no true origin; or, they are equally original as they are produced within a culture.[25]

The *trait* involves the ideas of difference and movement. In Derrida's notion of drawing, the differing movement of the *trait* gives the ground for the appearance of the work of art. However, the *trait* as the possibility of art must be distinguished from the concept of the line, if "line" is understood merely as a concrete and visible object and as something that is mathematical and linear in nature. Traditionally, the line implies a representation of a form: thus, the line repeats the shape of the object and draws it out. In this view, the notion of the line corresponds with the outline and is supposed to, more or less, follow the shape of the depicted object. As stated above, Derrida, however, finds a difference between the line and the *trait*: unlike the line, the *trait* is not a tool for replicating things. Against the ordinary notion of drawing that is based on the concept of line—in the sense of sketching the outline or form of a thing—Derrida does not identify the drawing and the *trait* with the production of forms. Namely, do objects have shapes and contours that the artist could reproduce with the use of line? In the lack of such available outlines, it is equally impossible to represent the objects of the world by using the *trait*—understood either in the sense of line, or as the pure possibility of leaving a trace. More than this, the drawing and the *trait* are insignificant by nature: they do not hold a meaning or a finality that the draughtsman would simply express in the drawing.[26] Although the *trait*, Derrida points out, may be "apparently visible" because of its ability to separate different levels and layers in the picture as well as colors, there is "nothing to see" in the *trait*, considering that it only allows us to perceive and identify things.[27] The very notion of the *trait* is part of Derrida's deconstruction of aesthetics: what he suggests is a notion that neither belongs to the system of the ideal or the sensible, but designates ambiguity and an abyss in a network of differences.[28]

With the feature of the *graphein*, the *trait* shares the quality of "graphic inscription." The *graphein* belongs to both drawing and writing. Thus, the *graphein* portrays not only inscription but also writing in general.[29] In this, the *trait* is in many respects comparable to the scope of *graphein*. At the origin of the *graphein*, there is a trace.[30] The figure of trace, being neither pure presence nor absence, is spectral by nature; thereby any thought of original presence of the *graphein* becomes effaced.[31] The *graphein* is involved in the potential act of drawing and the energy inherent in that act; for this reason, the *graphein* is neither sensible nor intelligible, but it rather works as the possibility of any inscription.

For Derrida, the *trait* represents both the condition of art and any signification, and their actualization in reality. With this, he makes explicit the idea that the *trait* exceeds the opposition of potentiality and the actuality, having the quality of both of them at the same time. In reaching beyond the limit of the ideal and the concrete, the *trait* divides itself between the transcendental and the actual in its different uses in Derrida. The play of absence and presence, of withdrawal and drawing again—*retrait* and *retirer*—happens at the very moment when the *trait* is drawn.[32] Due to this indeterminacy, the (in) appearance of the *trait* is neither ideal, nor intelligible, nor visible: in drawing, there is nothing that grants a place of a center or a "command post" to the viewer's eye.

It is possible to note that a similar structure applies to Derrida's account of language, where the spoken word is heard and understood, but nothing will make the word visible as such: "Language is spoken, it speaks to itself, which is to say, *from / of* blindness. It always speaks to us *from / of the blindness* that constitutes it."[33] The metaphor of blindness thus brings together concrete visuality and Derrida's notion of ambivalence inherent in linguistic significations. As he argues, one both writes and draws without seeing: "At once virtual, potential, and dynamic, this graphic crosses all the borders separating the senses, its being-in-potential at once visual and auditory, mobile and tactile. Later, its form will come to light like a developed photograph. But for now, at this very moment when I write, I see literally nothing of these letters."[34]

In place of origin, there is always a gap in the sense that the origin of presence is not present or absent as such. Derrida argues for an origin that remains, in fact, without any definite origin: "A trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun."[35] With the origin lacking foundation, he refers to the notion of pure, measurable space, which must be replaced with the thought of space as infinite divisibility and ability to produce places. The *trait* implies this kind of conception of spatiality: the *trait* is never common and there is no unity and homogeneity to it, but its divisibility founds text and traces: the

trait divides everything into what remains inside and what outside of it.[36] The *trait* never relates to itself without dividing itself just as soon—that is, its unity becomes divided all the time. The divisibility of the *trait* interrupts here all pure identification and forming, in the act in which it forms a thing. It appears that the ideal form is never presently reached in draughtsman's act for the reason that the form, as Derrida holds, merely takes on a form. Therefore, drawing relentlessly signals toward the inaccessibility of the form and moves toward the threshold where only the surroundings of the *trait* appear. As a result, the *trait* spaces its surroundings by delimiting. Accordingly, these surroundings do not belong to the *trait* itself. As Derrida stresses, *nothing* belongs to the *trait* in fact, nor to the drawing or the thought of drawing, not even its own trace.[37] Nothing participates in the *trait*; instead, it seems to join and adjoin only in separating things from one another.

The *trait* creates atopic places or places of pure difference. Meanings require the interaction of time and space, which are intertwined when retracting traits and traces: the *trait* creates a place as soon as it receives a position in the drawing. Derrida thus seems to state that, instead of having an abstract idea of the depicted subject initially, the effect of the differential traits is what comes first: they produce the drawing, and the resulting image is no longer identical with the represented subject. The spaces that surround the *traits* constitute the meaning. Thus, the *trait* creates spacing relentlessly because it does not cease from lingering in an intermediate state, that is, in the space between the inner and outer edges of the traits of the drawing. According to Derrida, this passe-partout can be "the picture, the painting, the figure, the form, the system of strokes [*traits*] and of colors."[38] Considering his notion of art, drawing probably forms the most coherent and articulate of his theories of the different arts. The concept of the *trait* is closely connected with his ideas of writing and the trace, even if drawing is not confined to the production of the signifying process. Derrida seems to rely on the notion that drawing always involves layers of practice that are redundant with respect to the drawn "subject," that can be neither copied nor represented exactly. What does it mean that, consequently, the drawing cannot be presented as an abstract system or an ideal drawing, but one always has to refer to a particular drawing with the specific traits that it is composed of? Bernard Stiegler answers: "*The image in general* does not exist."[39] This is to say that the drawing is irreducible to thinking or to the visible, but exists in an unlimited space between them. Accordingly, in drawing there is no "idea" or anything available that could be conveyed in general terms, unless the working of the *trait* itself. Unlike in the Derridean "writing," the form of signs and styles varies from one artist to another, from one drawing, medium and technique to the other. The alteration makes drawings therefore radically singular by nature. The *trait* and the

thinking of difference implied in it can be seen as part of Derrida's criticism toward the Saussurean division between the signifier and the signified. To Derrida, in drawing as in language, the ideal level is not possible without the thinking of the concrete, material phenomena.

Drawing and the *Trait*: From Linearity to Heterogeneity

What is fundamental to Derrida's *trait* is that it is not visible in reality. It is therefore difficult to characterize the *trait*: it does not have an objectively perceptible essence or figure. The *trait* is nothing in itself, but it *works* in the work of art. This makes the existence of each *trait* an event. Among the other traits in a work of art, even the artist's smallest stroke affects the entire composition and thus produces an unprecedented impression. Accordingly, every *trait* in its given context proves to be inimitable by nature.

To define what the *trait* is is yet difficult, almost impossible to answer exhaustively. When each of the traits or traces of the drawing takes its place among others and thus joins in a new way the composition, there happens a break between intended meanings and the possibility of new meanings. For Derrida, the *trait* leaves a trace, which makes the trace an element of the *trait*. Because the trace does not have a present origin or an origin in presence, Derrida says, the origin must already have been in repetition.[40] Is there an origin to art at all? In this question, Derrida's thinking differs from traditional transcendental philosophy, in which the origin of things, such as idea and concept, is conceived as self-identical. For Derrida, the origin of things is, however, empirical in the sense that it has always already taken place. The traces of a drawing serve as examples of this: because there are always several traits that emerge in common and from their relation to other *traits* and marks, their origin is divided and heterogeneous, never being self-identical.[41] The "origin" means here spacing and difference, which is why the prior possession of the image as *eidos*, idea or signifier becomes impossible.[42] "Heterogeneity" implies that each work of art arrives to its own limit: it is finite in the sense that based on its materiality, it presents its own presentation. Yet, this is not to say that the drawing would not be always related to its outside ecstatically: to other works, to other artists, theories, and history of art.

The trace is a result of the artist's work, the movement of the hand. However, it is also an act and event for the viewer of a work of art: when we see a drawing, it is not simply present to our eyes, but rather on the limit of its taking place. What does this mean? For Derrida, the shape of the drawing is outlined only in relation to the totality and complexity of all its traces, and only then can the *trait* become what it is. According to this argument,

the drawing is constantly in the state of becoming something, the *trait* itself having no identity.[43] Derrida's "trace" and the adjacent *trait* thus refer to the ever-emerging and constantly determined limits of the inside and the outside. Art holds in this respect a particular position for it allows more space for things to happen: its truths are finite and always only coming, never present as such, which makes them different from those of purely intelligible truths. In contrast to intelligible truths, art occupies the endlessly emerging and withdrawing borderline between presence and absence.

On such grounds, is it possible to say that the drawing is forever the other and differs from everything else? If the works stand out from all other things in the world, it follows that, at the same time, any work appears as internally heterogeneous and differentiated. Each work is a composite: it contains a diversity of details, composed of the use of materials, colors, forms, styles of expression, and other elements that together form something out of previously discordant, incongruous parts. If we suppose so, it means at once that the outlook of lines in a drawing differ from one another, too: they may be thinner or thicker or composed of a multiplicity of single strokes; what has the appearance of one single line can be composed of several separate lines, which are interlaced and interdependent. In general, the *trait* has neither form nor meaning before it is united to other traits and the act of thinking, when it opens into something and becomes seen as some thing. Namely, in each work, *traits* are arranged in a new way, as the general model of a work, like the abstract concept of art, does not exist until the artist begins to work. Derrida's view on heterogeneity that is inherent to art implies that every solution that the artist makes is—at least in principle—unique and unprecedented, in the absence of a conceptual schema.[44]

Neither the *trait* nor the signs of the drawing thus exist only "generally" in Derrida's opinion, nor do they have a presence "in general," but like the text, the drawing consists of pure traces.[45] Thus, an image that is composed of traits is ultimately devoid of identity or a reference object. The meaning of the image is born only in our own minds, as no image in itself, in what we observe on the surface of a paper, is able to remind anything or anyone. To resemble a thing or to be reminiscent of something, we need spectators' associations and memory.[46]

The Anti-Mimetic and Atopic *Trait*

As a concept, the *trait* resembles largely Derrida's idea of "trace" in that they exceed the categories of presence and absence. Yet the *trait* and the trace cannot be simply identified: the trace is a sign of absence, and as such, it is not intentional in nature. The *trait*, by contrast, is an intentional stroke. Therefore, the trace is an element of the *trait*, not its opposite.[47] Because the

trait is intentional, it delimits and borders on things and thus marks boundaries, while the *trait* "itself" withdraws in the act of the demarcation.

Derrida's idea of drawing is based on the deconstruction of a mimetic scheme of art, which he still sees to be a deep-seated model for the perception of art, despite the number of anti-mimetic theories of the twentieth century. His aim is to deconstruct the mimetic model that suggests that the use of line in a drawing reproduces the visible contours of reality. Among the properties of the *trait* is its ability to make things visible without merely repeating their shape or contours. Even if the stroke of the *trait* leaves a trace of reality on paper, the trace seems to continue toward emptiness, toward a realm that the viewer cannot see in the drawing. Accordingly, this means that the *trait* is nothing visible. Being invisible as such, it does not represent anything either. Therefore, the relation of the *trait* to reality cannot be mimetic; its concrete outcome, the line of the drawing, does not repeat the reality objectively either. Instead, the drawing is a matter of spacing as soon as something appears on paper: between the leaving of a trace and the *trait* there will inevitably be a gap.[48] It is possible to conclude from this idea that the model of the drawing and the image are never straightforwardly reducible to each other: there is always a spacing between them, a difference or a break: a remainder that one cannot make a figure of. Therefore, what is shown in the drawing is dependent on the partitioned space, in the rhythm that composes the invisible.[49] According to Derrida's argument, instead of transforming available meanings into images, the drawing produces a rupture that allows the birth of an open sense, dependent on the manner of presentation and on the spectator's freedom to interpret the drawing.

Only because things differ from each other can they mean something to us. On such a basis, it is possible to state that the *trait* cannot be enclosed within the scheme of mimesis, if mimesis is understood as imitation. The *trait* is not something we make use of to reproduce simply the form or outline of a thing: rather, the *trait* is a liminal concept, as it figures only as a limit and at a border between different things. Even if the *trait* is reproductive, it must proceed in the "night," in the nothing, since it escapes the field of the vision. The *trait* is not yet visible and does not belong to the realm of the spectacle of spectacular objectivity—and so that which it makes happen or come (*advenir*) cannot itself be mimetic.

In this standpoint, Derrida's theory that centers on the ambiguity of the *trait* both follows and reacts to several influential modern philosophical accounts of the significance of drawing, in which the line as imitation of reality is questioned. In the essay *Eye and Mind*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty states that there has been a "prosaic conception of the line as a positive attribute and property of the object in itself."[50] In place of this traditional view, he presents an altogether different vision: he detaches the notion of the line from the

visible lines of any drawn or painted figure. Citing Henri Bergson, Merleau-Ponty advances that the line "is no more here than there," and yet it "gives the key to the whole."[51] For this reason, the line must be freed and its constitutive power revivified: the power to the thought of the line which no longer imitates the visible, but *renders* things visible. Therefore, in a way, the line itself lacks visibility; for Merleau-Ponty, it is "a blueprint of a genesis of things."[52]

Derrida's view on the *trait* follows Merleau-Ponty's thinking, if one considers that for both of them the function of the line is not to separate two things from one another; instead, the line means separation itself. In Merleau-Ponty, every inflection in the drawing of a line will have a diacritical, differentiating value and it will be an "aspect of the line's relationship to itself, will form an adventure, a history, a meaning of the line—all this according as it slants more or less, more or less rapidly, more or less subtly." The line is no longer a thing or an imitation of a thing, but "a certain disequilibrium contrived within the indifference of the white paper; it is a certain hollow opened up within the in-itself, a certain constitutive emptiness."[53]

Like the Derridean *trait*, Merleau-Ponty's concept of "line" is destined to open a space that itself is without place. This is to say that the *trait* and the Merleau-Pontian line alike are not located in a predetermined, measurable space. In Merleau-Ponty and Derrida alike, they are internally divisible and abysmal rather than visible representations of a thing. According to Merleau-Ponty, the line does not simply imitate the shape or contour of things, but it has a more fundamental meaning: the line is the beginning of things, and it creates drawn spaces. In his philosophy of drawing and of the *trait*, Derrida tries to break the difference between form and substance, which for centuries has defined the theories of drawing.

What nevertheless distinguishes Derrida's conception of drawing from Merleau-Ponty's is that the *trait* creates space and time in the world, without which the presentation of things would be impossible. Derrida wants to question the very idea that there would be a natural or self-evident relation between the *trait* and the things of the world, of which the artist would make a depiction. Even more, he turns this idea of artistic imitation to its opposite: the *trait* in art precedes reality. Traits are the condition for the fact that we are able to perceive shapes in the world; the *trait* is a material fact, but, as such, it is not yet anything. The *trait* contributes, above all, to the creation of space.[54] In his analysis of Valerio Adami's drawings, Jean-François Lyotard interestingly presents a similar conclusion: "The line comes before the curvature of surfaces. One must grasp what it is before it takes shape."[55] This perspective, however, is probably the draughtsman's more than the spectator's, which is what Derrida seems to emphasize implicitly. In his account, the *trait* and the space of drawing are mutually dependent and come into existence

simultaneously. In any case, the notion that the *trait* precedes all that is visible is shared by Derrida and Lyotard: in Lyotard's words, "the line is anterior to all tracing and all crime, and makes them possible."[56]

To sum up, like the line of a drawing, the *trait* cannot be appropriated in the mimetic system. Instead, the *trait* suggests that there is always an abyss between the realms of the visible and the intelligible. According to Derrida, when a draughtsman draws a line, the act of drawing does not copy anything that would already exist in the world. The *trait* that gives the transcendental condition for the drawing of the line does not follow the shape of objects that would serve as a model for drawing. As the *trait* is atopic, or located in a placeless place between the visible world and the invisible possibility of its signification, it does not accommodate the traditional idea of mimesis or artistic imitation—that art would present things existing in the world and refer to the reality outside of the work. The invention of the *trait* does not follow from what is presently visible, nor does it conform to what would be set in front of the beholder of the drawing as a theme. From the concept of the *trait*, Derrida derives the word *retrait*: retreat, withdrawal, and redrawing. Retreating is even at the heart of visibility, for it can be detached from the object of vision; unlike other senses, the visible does not require an object, but vision can relinquish it and proceed to the realm of the intelligible.[57]

Especially from the viewpoint of place, Derrida's discussion on drawing and the *trait* bears an affinity with the questions concerning the frame in *The Truth in Painting*: both the *trait* and the frame refer to a notion of being without a predetermined place. In *The Truth in Painting*, the passe-partout or the picture frame indicates the limits of the truth of a work of art, the truth that at once is divided and multiplied, being neither inside nor outside the frame. Therefore, the place of truth is passe-partout itself, which, however, remains without place: it *generates* space, creating ever-new frames inside each other.[58] Such spacing is the work of *différance* and must be termed "temporalization" at once it is considered to be spatiality. Therefore, the place of truth as passe-partout is a limit that marks the division between the two sides of the work of art but in reality does not belong to either of them. The frame delimits and creates non-place, a place of different relations, or a constant differing and deferring movement. These notions involve the interplay between time and space, and thus they are connected with the *trait*, which both constitutes places and is in a place. The *trait* gives rise to what is drawn, since the lines thus produced are no longer merely outlines surrounding the drawn object. The *trait* incessantly spaces itself out, for it is in the state of in-between: between the internal and the external edge of what the *trait* gives us to see and lets a thing appear. The thought of a delimiting boundary as displacement thus seems to hide a paradox in Derrida: the passe-partout is finally without

a place of its own, because it means merely a differential space between the image and its exterior. The passe-partout creates placeless places and new frames within one another.[59]

From what is said above, it follows that the *trait* possesses two simultaneous attributes: first, it is in space, and second, it has the ability to form space. They suggest that the *trait* is closely related to Derrida's concept of the trace: both imply a movement that gives rise to space and time, the conditions of signification.[60] However, the *trait* differs from the trace in that the *trait* is not a spatial concept as such, but rather the condition of space, an invisible limit between things that creates space.[61]

According to Derrida's argument, the *trait* does not come into being as the result of anything that would already exist. From this follows that the *trait* cannot be identified to what appears to be the subject of the drawing. The *trait* creates not a visible figure but rather differences that amount to the disappearance (*éclipse*) of the *trait*.[62] The *trait*, in a way, vanishes into the drawing's presentation—and yet each *trait*, and in concrete terms, each line, proves meaningful in its own place. Derrida's thinking is associated with the wish to detach from the aesthetics of figures and the thought that the drawing as presence would give us the "truth" of its subject; namely, the self-eclipsing *trait* cannot even be spoken about in the present, since it is not gathered into any present. It follows that the outline or tracing "separates and separates itself"; it retraces only borderlines, intervals, a spacing grid with no possible appropriation. The linearity of the limit is therefore not of ideal nature, that is, available to thinking only: namely, the traced lines seem to continue to the space outside the drawing and thus to appear in new connections.[63] Correspondingly, the *trait* is not only discerned visually. It is instead an enigmatic relationship between the interior and exterior: the *trait* entails the creation of an intermediate space.

Where does the *trait* begin? If we suppose, as Derrida, that the *trait* does not simply present reality, how should its function be described in the drawing actually? In the place of the origin, there is always a gap, in the sense that the origin of things is neither present nor absent as such. Things leave traces in our memory and experience, as well as in different inscriptions. The spectral traces replace the presence that has never been present and the origin from which nothing has begun.[64] That there exists no absolute origin to which things can be traced means that the point of origin for any perception or phenomenon is always fictitious and imagined.

What Derrida says of drawing appears to be equally related to the art of printmaking that Derrida does not discuss explicitly. Usually, prints are created by transferring ink or other kinds of color from a matrix to paper or other material. The process of printmaking involves a difference between the

matrix—the base from which a print is made—and the print: there is always a distance in time and space in the act of transferring the "original" image from the matrix to the sheet of paper or other material. The resulting prints have yet an original and thus more or less unanticipated quality of their own, rather than being merely a reproduction or a copy of the original matrix; this is because the techniques used in printmaking often give the impressions a degree of variation. From this perspective, some features of the idea of printmaking belong to Derrida's idea of drawing as well. Namely, what he appears to seek in drawing is an aspect of difference that reminds of the interval characteristic to the process of printing: in drawing, the difference exists as a break between the *traits* and their origin, the model of each drawing, which is always already produced and reproduced by its contexts. Therefore, a drawing never provides us with a "total" image of what it presents.

According to Derrida's central argument, we cannot see the *trait*. From this condition follows that the *trait* is invisible and the draughtsman or -woman is blind to it. Admittedly, the *trait* does leave a trace, but the *trait* itself cannot be seen, as it vanishes into its own presentation, wearing itself out to mark the single edge of a contour: between the inside and the outside of a figure. The *trait* does not consequently describe a phenomenon that is present elsewhere, nor does it describe anything latent, imaginary, unconscious, hidden, or past.[65] The *trait* is what makes it possible for a thing to distinguish itself in art and elsewhere: it is a condition of becoming visible, while the *trait* itself remains without identity and place, *topos*. This is the function of the *trait* not only in drawings but also in paintings and other varieties of art: the *trait* is the continually emerging and disappearing boundary between what is present and what is absent.[66] The essence or identity of things can be reached only in the disappearance of the universal essence provided by conceptual unity.

According to Derrida, we can understand reality only when it receives a linguistic expression or other articulation in a system of significations in a culture. Is it feasible to say, then, that the *trait* and the resulting drawing are also part of these signifying systems because they spring from structures of differences? To consider this, we may think of the fact that all *traits* exist outside one another and are hence heterogeneous.[67] Yet, drawing exceeds language in that its traces leave abyssal spaces to be filled by imagination, memory, and thinking.[68] The act of drawing and discourse are mutually exclusive; at the same time, they ceaselessly come to the place of each other, as the drawn image invites speech and vice versa: words invite images.[69] Seeing and blindness are thus not in a relation of mutual exclusion, but they encompass each other. Yet, although seeing includes a fundamental blindness, it produces language. Our language and perception belong together in that language is drawn, both consciously and unconsciously, toward the perception of things. Perception is, thus, bodily in nature: in art, the sign

becomes embodied in the materiality of the work or performance.[70] For the reason of the connection between language and seeing, language may not be altogether blind but inclined to making perceptions.

Clearly, the concept of the *trait* reflects Derrida's idea of language, as each stroke in the drawing works in a manner that is comparable to writing. It is always a trace of something that no longer exists but that is still repeatable—it is possible to add new lines in every drawing or the artist can start an entirely new work with unforeseen lines.[71] The possibility of the *trait* to present a figure never belongs to the *trait* itself or even to a configuration of traits. Instead, the figure is seen as though *despite* the traits, through them and past them, with the result that the connection with the "real" object is born only in the mind of the spectator, in memory and associations.

Especially in *Memoirs of the Blind*, Derrida builds his argument on the assumption that drawing always involves a difference between the original and what is drawn by the artist; "the original" may refer to concrete models and abstract ideas alike. In the case of what is habitually called "abstraction" or "nonfigurative art," the structure of the outcome is (re)presentative in the sense that the work shows itself. What is important is how it does this; how it offers something to be perceived. Here, the experience itself emerges in front of the spectator.[72] The consequences of this claim are manifold: instead of representing a preconceived notion that the spectator could identify, the drawing originates rather from the dissemblance of meaning. It can be described as an "inexperienced experience," an unpredictable event where the difference between knowing and not-knowing becomes insignificant.[73] It amounts to a notion of drawing and art as an experience of "nothing to see" that is liberated from all intention and preconceived ideas. If the draughtsman is dependent on a prepossessed idea of what the drawing should look like or what would be the "right" or "wrong" way to practice drawing, this inevitably limits the activity of the draughtsman and leads drawing toward the reproduction of an idea. Instead of relying on premeditated forms, Derrida offers the deconstruction of conventions of seeing and the activity of drawing, which take recourse in the use of generally recognized signs and symbols. He suggests that drawing has its origin in "blindness": in a domain that exists beyond the artist's conscious will to produce likeness that would take its model from previous images or any ordinary understanding of representation.

Referring to Henri Fantin-Latour's self-portraits, Derrida points to the fact that one's eye cannot see itself seeing. Instead, the draughtsman's "blind eye sees itself blind," but the eye disappears right at the moment when the drawing tries desperately to recapture it in the drawing. This is what he calls the "nocturnal truth, the other eye is already plunged in into the night, sometimes just barely hidden, veiled, withdrawn (*en retrait*), sometimes totally indiscernible and dissolved into a blotch."[74] From one blindness, the other. Thus,

Derrida's theory of drawing ultimately reaches beyond any aesthetics of mimeticism and forms: the *trait* is not an object but rather a transition (*trajet*) or a trace that is taking form.[75] It is comparable to his idea of the portrait that is not mimetic in the sense that it would imitate a visible model, but in the sense that the produced work is a portrait of art "in general." In Derrida's philosophy of the *trait*, it is possible to discern that drawing is something on the verge of taking form, not yet quite what it is and never finished. There is thus always a sense of otherness in drawing: it is both difference from all that there is and difference from itself.[76]

THE TRACES OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Alongside painting and drawing, photography forms the third paradigm of the visual arts for Derrida. He has written extensively about the photographs, although it often appears that he refuses to make a consistent theory of photography. Derrida's treatment of photography may be the most fragmentary among the different fields of art he has explored, as well as the most personal, which can be one of the reasons of his keeping a distance toward the question of what the photographs might be "about." Derrida's critique of photograph is directed at the conception according to which the photograph would represent straightforwardly an image of reality, namely the reality as image. This notion is essentially connected with his treatment of the concepts of the image and work conceived as totalities. It is also linked with his theory of painting, constructed around the theme of the *parergon*.

In recent discussions, the epistemic capacities of photography have been under debate.[77] Photographic imaging is identified by whether or not light is responsible for the formation of the image, or, whether it implicates an event of recording information from a light image of its causal history. On the one hand, theorists have relied on the "automatism" of the photography, in which view it appears as mechanical production generated by a nonliving agent "without the creative intervention of man."[78] On the other hand, there are accounts that emphasize, instead of automatism, the fact that all photographic event requires further processing to make the latent image visible. Derrida's inclination toward the latter notion is evident.

When discussing photography, Derrida speaks about memory. It is not only a question associated with the ontology of the image or something that photographs evoke, but the photographs that he examines are often a matter of personal memories.[79] In a wider perspective, Derrida's thinking of photography is connected with the notion that could be formulated in semiotic terms as the indexicality of photograph, that is, the traditional belief that photographs depict reality in an accurate fashion. Indexicality means that the photograph

is considered to be related to its referent, which makes it a representation of truth.[80] For Derrida, however, the reference and truth are never in the image, but they are rather to be *made*, no less than revealed, unveiled, exposed, and developed in the photograph.[81] His aim is to show that this relation is more complex than is assumed in many theories; from this viewpoint, his analysis often comes close to Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (1980) in a way that occasionally Derrida's comments on photography may be read as a response to Barthes's analysis of its nature and power.

Writing of Light and Shadow

Like Barthes, Derrida takes part in the discussion on the ontology of photography. According to Peter Osborne, the ontology of the contemporary photograph is that of a "relational totality." Its totality is relational, rather than expressive, because photography, like any other art, is a cultural-historical form. There is no single underlying, ontologically fundamental basis to its unity, for example, a single technology that would allow for the specification for photography as a unified "medium." In Osborne's words, "Understood historically, the question of the ontology of photographic image is in large part the question of the *mode of unity of the relational totality* of the variety of different photographic forms coexisting within the present: chemical photography, film, television, video and digital imaging—to name only the five main forms—the spine, if you like, of the still expanding field."[82] With respect to Derrida's theory of photography, one may inquire whether Derrida gives any unity to it, or art and the arts in a more general scale. As it seems, there may not be one for him, but he still treats the different arts as separate fields that engender questions related to them in specific. Like painting, photography has been for decades an expanding field, and yet it undeniably has practices that belong to photography, reproduction and absence of the referent being one of them. As it appears, the materiality of the photograph—its facticity as an image—is still relevant to Derrida and forms the ground of his argument.

To begin with, Derrida defines photograph to be, according to its Greek etymology, "writing of light," due to its technical reproducibility.[83] Photography is, exactly, disclosing the writing of light, the light that seems to offer itself as the visibility of the visible—of the image—itself.[84] Yet, to exist as "writing with light," photography has to be also *skiagraphy*, "shadow writing" or the "writing of shadow," as Derrida suggests in his discussion on drawing in *Memoirs of the Blind*. *Skiagraphia* prefigures the imprint of an absent present; a simultaneous memory, a memory of the instant, a division of the instant, archive of the present.[85] The Platonic term *skiagraphia*, "shadow writing," points to the idea that distance makes the outlines appear.[86] For Derrida, this means what is described as a play of shadow and light is

already a form of writing.[87] *Skiagraphia* is essential because it appears as difference *in* light, the difference of exposure being the first possibility of the trace, of the photograph as archive and of everything that follows it in Derrida's account: memory, the technics of memory, and mnemotechnics. *Skiagraphia* includes the play between the visible and the invisible, namely that they originate from one another in a mutual interplay. Like the *trait* of drawing, the photographic image thus involves the simultaneous elements of the visible and the invisible, which continuously engender each other without being in an oppositional relation. Light and shadow are thus not each other's oppositions in the photographic image, but remain haunted by one another.[88] The photograph is also a matter of the technics of thinking and of awaiting surprises: of "archiving the speed of light" and capturing what will be lost infinitely.[89] If light proceeds from the dark, it still belongs to the shadow. Therefore, the relation of light and shadow is not dialectical, but they originate from the same undifferentiated source.[90]

Apart from being writing of shadow and light, the photograph indeed presents itself as an archive to Derrida. It is an archive that consists of its own memory and its own reproduction; a photographic archive offers also a proof of an event and of reality.[91] Such an archive is not simply the copy, the reproduction or the imprint of another present, but an experience of the singular, of the non-iterable, of the unique. Thus, at stake in the photograph is the point of view or the instantaneous approach to the object. Derrida describes such manner as a "matter of the *pointe*, the *point* of the event, its pointedness—*stigmê*, *Punkt*."[92] Such a point is indivisible. It refers to a singular and irreplaceable event, but its presence itself is divisible. The photograph therefore represents an archive in the sense that the number of possible images taken at a given moment is limitless and thus divisible, while each photograph remains unique, irreplaceable, and self-identical. To quote Derrida, "The structure of the present must be divided so that, even as the present is lost, the archive remains and refers to it as to a non-reproducible referent, an irreplaceable place."[93]

Derrida's theory of photography complicates the everyday notion that photography would simply record events, things, and persons as they have been, or in their truth. Derrida does not deny the photograph's ability to refer to its outside, but he calls into question the status of the referent. Rather, *recording* an image is inseparable from *producing* an image and therefore loses the reference to an external and unique referent.[94] This loss leads to the merging of the image and the model.[95] Like Barthes, Derrida says that reference is ineffaceable in photography, since it leaves a visible trace on the film. Here, reference means repetition of what has taken place only once. Yet, at the same time, every original imprint is divided as an archive and preserves its reference, as with the original manuscript of a letter, or a signature, for

example. The photograph reproduces the original by means of light, but it also fragments and ruins space, unlike photocopy, which is exact duplication. Derrida's notion of photography as original copy has no doubt some affinity with the concept of "non-photography" introduced by François Laruelle: the photograph that creates an image that precedes both copy and abstraction. The movement between original and copy or photography and its referent is not a reflexive one but rather remains in a state of indecision. As Laruelle states, a photograph is a fiction and, as such, wholly real but in its own mode.[96]

In the essay *Prégnances*, Derrida compares Colette Deblé's wash paintings to photographs in that they are born as a result of development in liquids and, as such, have the character of revelation. In this process, a thing comes into light from seemingly nowhere. According to Ginette Michaud's interpretation, photography holds Derrida's attention by its reflexive capacity, by the movement of thought that becomes visible in a "waterline" between two waters, in the same way as in the "photographic bath" where "the revelation trembles by force of the truth," like in passing.[97] This waterline separates two aspects of the imaged thing: the someone and the no one, the personal and the impersonal. As it appears, in *Prégnances*, the photograph and its inherent structure of originary repetition forms a paradigm for Derrida's notion painting.

In any case, the capacity of revelation is essentially dependent on visibility, which is nothing visible or otherwise sensible itself: "This light makes being possible, that is, the *eidos* as veritable being, this sun being visible as such."[98] At stake in photographs, understood in terms of phantasms, are images without *eidos* or idea. A similar structure is at stake in Aristotle's notion of the diaphanous or the transparent, the necessary condition of seeing and thus a kind of medium, which can be either light or darkness.[99] Like in the treatment of drawing, seeing becomes a complex issue in Derrida's analysis of photographs. Blindness and its varieties—clairvoyance or phantasm, "believing to see," as Ginette Michaud points out—are part of the structure of seeing, from which reflection is thus inseparable.[100] The photograph would thus have the quality of "spectrography of a quasi-hallucination, an image that shivers at the bottom of solution, in the developer liquid"—and thus between the phantasm and the real, the virtual and the actual, the spectral and the effective, and truth and the simulacrum.

Spectrality and the Deferred Image

In Derrida's most extended essays on photography, "A Lecture on *Right of Inspection*" (1985) and *Demeure, Athènes* (1996), the analysis of technical reproduction in photography brings about a number of questions that are already familiar from his theory of painting and drawing. Among them one

finds the problematic of the nature of representation and the adjacent notions of repetition, traces of some other presence, as well as echo, negatives without origin, and the affect of deferral and postponement (*retard*, *retardement*) without return to some more "real" or "truthful" state of affairs that would have preexisted the photograph.[101]

Especially repetition is an important notion for the ontology of the photograph. Derrida's argument of it is grounded in the thought of an original double, namely a double that becomes an original in the photographic image. At the heart of the reproducible itself one will always find an irreproducibility.[102] In other words, the referent is singular, but it is reproducible and thus, as stated above, divisible. Consequently, the photographic act implies a series, while in drawing, for example, there is only one single piece available in each act of tracing the line.[103] Repetition has yet another aspect, namely seriality, which is inseparable from singularity of each photograph, of the uniqueness and irreplaceable nature of each photographed moment. In "A Lecture on *Right of Inspection*," Derrida analyses the phenomenon of repetition, which is shown by the series of images in Marie-Françoise Plissart's photo-novel, a story told in photographs. Here, the photos refer to and thus seem to include another photo. In this way, they form an abyssal and hence open structure of images that are reinserted within another and integrated into series of images. Because of their abyssal repetition, Plissart's photographs also hold the aspect of time—"the time allowing the right to inspect," as Derrida says.[104] The photos or some of their fragments generate other photos; in fact, Derrida calls them *une suite de génériques*, "generic sequences," in which one passes from one photo to another.[105] Thus, like writing, each photograph in Plissart's *Right of Inspection* is for Derrida a supplement to another, which makes it impossible to define the beginning and the end of the story and thus to limit their "frame" or the essential story and the sequence of the images. The series of photos offers a large number of possible stories for the spectator's discovery. At the same time, the question of *parergon* is enacted also in that the inside and the outside of Plissart's images change places in the *mise en abyme* structure of images that include persons, places, objects, or other photographic details, like the use of light and composition, that appear in other images.

This leads Derrida to think that the photograph has the character of the unique event, the "one single time" or the "onceness" (*Einmaligkeit*; *une seule fois*).[106] The principle of the "one single time" supposes "the undecomposable simplicity, beyond all analysis, of a time of the instant: the moment as the *Augenblick*, the eye blink of the *prise de vue*, of a shot or of taking (in) a view."[107]

Like Derrida's, Roland Barthes's ontology of photography is based on the unique way that photographs embody time and space. When the photograph

is taken, a moment is simultaneously immortalized and gone forever. Barthes describes the photograph as "the living image of a dead thing," "a corpse."[108] Barthes's idea of "Photography-as-Death" recalls Maurice Blanchot's conception of the image as cadaver, which advances his view of unreality, "the u-topia of Death."[109] In looking at photographs, we are confronted with what Barthes calls the "having-been-there" quality of its contents that contain the elements of composition and the *punctum*.[110] It substantiates the existence of a specific thing in a specific place at a specific time; for Barthes, the model's presence to the camera is incontestable. Similarly, a photograph offers a view of the world that one will never have access to except through the image. A photograph can only show the past, but it represents it in such a way that it appears in the present. This paradox grants every photograph a sense of nostalgia and longing.

For Barthes, the photograph records information in a specific way: it is "the living image of a dead thing," the absence of the dead as presence. Barthes and Derrida both share the idea of photography as phantasmalogy and they position photography beyond the codes of language and culture. In Derrida, the notion of presence becomes more complex than in Barthes, however, as Derrida begins his inquiry of photography by criticizing the ontological opposition of presence and absence, the opposition of the living and the dead. Indeed, he parallels sign itself to death.[111] The undoing of hierarchies extends also to the relation between "artifactuality" and "virtuactuality."[112] In photography at stake is the position of the ocular and the optical, but Derrida extends his thinking to the metaphor and image: all that "appears to the eye"—even if by disappearing.[113]

For Derrida, the notion that the existence of the referent is singular is even the condition of the photograph; this is what Barthes has stated also.[114] The "one single time" suggested by Derrida can also be read as the "once and for all" (*le* "une seule fois pour toutes"): as a metonymy and an exemplary example of all photographs.[115] The photograph as an image that exists as an example of all possible photographs implies the thought of a large number of images and seriality, like the film projected at the rate of twenty-four frames per second.[116] This is to say that the photograph would give the viewer to see an image of a "subject" that would refer to *all* possible images taken of a similar event or the same person. In this sense, the photograph functions in the same way as a fragment in theories of Romanticism: although always related to the larger unity of the referent, the photograph is, as such, complete as a fragment.[117] Its referent thus always seems to lack a total representation in Derrida: it is split within itself and without foundation.

The question of reproduction is commensurate with the overall scheme of the graphic arts in that in both of them is at play a kind of invention of the originary. In drawing, the model is produced by the draughtsman's act

of retracing, while in photography invention points to the discovery or the revelation of what is already there. As Derrida explains, this is the invention of the referent "by a sort of gaze, a sort of intuition or artificial eye."[118] In other words, one invents the other where he is not. In addition to revelation, invention has for Derrida also the sense of a technical intervention: the production of a new technical apparatus that constitutes the other instead of simply receiving him. Thus, two senses parasite off another in the photographic experience. Therefore, the core of Derrida's view on photography is perhaps on the complexity of reference, in which occur subevents, differentiations, and modifications, which in turn give rise to possible compositions, dissociations, and recompositions, to "effects," to artifices that break with the presumed phenomenological naturalism. It breaks the unalterable and uniterable experience of a pretechnical perception—"as if there were any such thing," Derrida remarks.[119] More than this, the photograph is a medium in which each invention—or supplement—is originary.[120] This is visible in the images of *Right of Inspection*, in which the reference of the photographs is deferred: events take place and characters remain *outside* of situations that are represented in the images. The spectator must see the whole verbal narration or word—even "fable"—through the images, but it does not let itself be seen right through the images. The photographic narration tells only about itself; it invites words, but the narrative is only seen when it is photographed, Derrida reminds.[121] The possibility of verbal narratives is as endless as it is imaginative. As it seems, Derrida thinks of photography in terms of the place where there is every time at stake no less than thinking of "the unrepresentable" otherwise, in a way that differs from the Western tradition and philosophical way of reflecting on the scope of what cannot be represented. Yet, this principle possibly applies to all images in Derrida: cinematographic, videographic, pictorial, sonorous, and choreographic.[122]

Acknowledging that it is impossible to deny Barthes's condition of photography, the fact that "the thing has been there," for Derrida the type of reality of the photographs is that of the perceptible referent, and nothing else.[123] The idea of photography as "the thing has been here" as Barthes states in *Camera Lucida* represents for Derrida something like a naïve understanding of the reality of photographs: that the image would be taken as an indisputable proof of its reality. More exactly, the photograph evokes an awareness of its "having-been-here." This is a new space-time category, which involves spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority.[124] For Bernard Stiegler, the "this was" or "having been" (*le* ça a été) is the condition of the analogue photograph, whereas manipulation is the essence of the digital photo: the *not having been*.[125] This thought resonates with what Barthes calls photographic reality effect or effect of the real (*l'effet de réel*) that explains how disconnected, superfluous elements connect with the general structure

of the narrative in a text, literary or photographic alike, and produce in the reader a sense of reality.[126] Derrida tries to show the impossibility of the ideal subject—the "being-in-perpetuity and enduring presence"—that would be identical to itself. For him, the ideality of the "having been" of "myself," or what seems to be identical with "the self" of the photographed image, can only be missing.[127] If photographs are related to reality, it is for Derrida only on the condition that the spectator, by means of his or her reflection, finds a reference to reality: the photos remain silent, while the spectator creates his or her own narrative with a temporal linearity to make sense of the images. In brief, the photograph is never something that purely delivers information.

In photography and drawing alike, the feature of retard has an obvious affinity with Derrida's concepts of retreat and retracing in the context of the *trait*. The graphic act, namely the *trait*, never appears for a first time, but it begins as if by being renewed: retraced and retracted.[128] With this, he reminds that other traces have appeared countless times before something is presented, in a drawing or a photograph, for example, and each trace we see is related to earlier ones: in other photographs or somewhere else. Thus, all details in photographs are related to other ones as well as to the world outside of them. This notion brings into discussion the relation between production and reproduction in the photograph: what does its originality mean, if it always entails repetition, the original reproduction of copies?[129] Derrida's question of the original that is always in retreat of itself resonates clearly with Barthes's words in *Camera Lucida*: "In order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes."[130]

The black-and-white appearance of the photographs taken up by Derrida presents what is disclosed by the scene of writing. From "Right of Inspection" one learns that "The spectral is the essence of photography"[131]; in "Copy, Archive, Signature," he affirms that "the medium of photography is inhabited by ghosts, by revenants."[132] For Derrida, photography is thus all about traces: although the photograph does not suspend its explicit dependence on a visible referent, it shows that the referent is spectral.[133] Or, the ghostly medium suggests that the photograph is unable to produce the referent, and the referent itself becomes "spectralized."[134] This is also to say that the *phainesthai* of the referent is linked with *technē* in an originary fashion, since spectrality is always conditioned by its technology. The nature of the ghostly image depends on its medium. Speaking about a video work by Gary Hill, Derrida reminds: "a presentation . . . should reveal that there is not and has never been direct presentation."[135] By this, he in all likelihood intends to say that what is presented is never the thing "itself," but a simulacrum, presentation that is conditioned by the medium, technique, production, discourses—the entire context involved in the work. According to Bernard Stiegler, Barthes mobilizes in his study of photography suspension or interruption, *ēpokhē* in Greek,

which is "the main concept of phenomenology." Barthes proposes that photography constitutes an *ēpokhē* in relation to time, to memory, and to death, but he does so in a sense that subverts every classical phenomenology.[136]

At stake in photographs, understood in terms of phantasms, are therefore images without *eidos* or idea. As Derrida proposes, the question of the phenomenon or of the *phainesthai*, and thus of phantasm and spectrality, of the hallucinatory "believing to see" and of the predominance of *eidos*, has regulated theories of art from Plato to Husserl.[137] This would mean that the image would give us to see the objective ideality, or idealization of ideality. By this, I understand that Derrida means the object or signification of the image, which would be separable from its material support and the context of the image. This claim, visible in Derrida's writings on photography, proves of course highly improbable for him. The image-object printed on photosensitive paper that Barthes calls the *spectrum* is produced by touch—a ghostly effect that is irreversible: affected by the touch of light on paper, I am touched, but I am not able to touch the person in the photo.[138]

The photographic trace appears like writing's trace, as they both produce sense through the spectral figure of the trace, as do drawing's inapparent *traits*. A modality of believing belongs to the spectral phenomenon of the photograph and what Derrida sees to be its essential prerequisite: "One thinks without believing, but thinking without believing remains a belief."[139] The question of believing emerges also in the film *Ghost Dance*, directed by the British filmmaker Ken McMullen in 1983, which is an analysis of conceptions of ghosts, memory, and the nature of cinema.[140] In this film, Derrida has a prominent role as a philosopher of media theory and of "hauntology." The main character of the film, Pascale, who is played by Pascale Ogier, makes an appointment with Derrida at his office. In the otherwise improvised scene, she asks Derrida the inevitable question about the spectrality of images: *Et vous? Croyez-vous aux fantômes?*—"And what about you, do you believe in ghosts?"[141] The shooting of the film makes each of the characters spectral on the screen—they are the simulacra of themselves, as their presence is mediated. In this living presence, they are absent and "haunt" the film images that revive them: on the film, the persons are traces of their anticipated absence. At the same time, each of the characters bears in itself the possibility of death. This is something that Derrida reminisces about later, as his co-star Pascale Ogier died in 1984, the year following the completion of *Ghost Dance*.[142]

Derrida's essay "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" was a necrology published shortly after Roland Barthes's death in 1980. In this essay, Derrida takes up Barthes's famous discussion of the Winter Garden photograph in his book *Camera Lucida*. What is distinctive in this photo of Barthes's mother as a child is that Barthes finds it impossible to show the photograph itself in the essay. The *punctum* in this photograph is so powerful and overwhelming

and implicated in Barthes's anticipation of his own death, that he simply cannot reproduce it in *Camera Lucida*: "I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the 'ordinary'; it cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound."[143] With his famous term *punctum*, Barthes expresses the point or sudden wound that makes a particular photograph reveal something to a particular viewer. The Winter Garden photograph thus becomes the absent, and hence more potent, referent of Barthes's praise of presence. For Derrida, this photograph is the invisible *punctum* of Barthes's entire book: it does not belong to the corpus of photographs that Barthes exhibits, and yet it irradiates the entire *Camera Lucida*.[144] In its invisibility, and the invisibility of the *punctum* for Barthes, the missing Winter Garden photograph makes one see something else than what is in the image itself: something that comes from outside of the photograph, the voice of the other, a truth of the photo which is never present in it as such. Indeed, every photograph is for Barthes a memorial, and the very essence of the medium is its spectral conjuring of death-in-life.

At the same time, photographs and their fragments generate other images, and there are photos that put into operation a *mise en abyme* structure, a structure in which something is repeated, but in a way that leaves open the signification and referent of the images.[145] The spectrality of the image is neither that of the dead nor of the living, neither of perception nor of hallucination, and that works in virtual and phantasmatic effects, affective and affected. In the Winter Garden photograph, Barthes discovers his mother, aged five years, and in looking at the image he perceives qualities that later came to describe her mother in Barthes's mind: gentleness and kindness.[146] While they do not appear in the photograph, it is as if these features shone through the image. Barthes feels these qualities in an emotion of grief, and grief evokes the mother's presence. Therefore, he says, in the ability to collect the predicates that constitute the mother's being, the image contains "more than the being of photography can reasonably offer."[147] However, it does not unfold to Barthes the truth of being as the work of art does in Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art*, but the identity of the photograph and the mother alike that Barthes calls "the impossible science of the unique being."[148] The photograph presents the unique character of its unique instant. It creates unity by presenting itself as individual, indivisible singularity, the having-been-her, which for Barthes is not treatable (*traitable*) itself as such. The *punctum* means the "Intractable" (*l'"Intraitable"*), the untouched, unmanipulated grain that is printed on the paper as an effect of the luminances.[149] Thus, the *punctum* is characterized by

incontinuity, which gives the image an irreducible singularity. The operation of the *punctum* in a certain context is inimitable.

In Derrida's interpretation, the Winter Garden photograph is an image that resists images; it resists conceiving the image as a totality. Its *traits* are traces in memory, in absence, and they may be present to us only in the fleeting words of Barthes. The concept of *punctum* that the Winter Garden photo activates is of great importance to Derrida. The scope of *punctum* resembles that of his *trait*: both the *punctum* and the *trait* are something that organize the image anew like a cut that pierces it. The *punctum* and the *trait* are neither in the image nor outside of it. In the film *D'ailleurs, Derrida*, Derrida speaks about a displaced tile in front of his childhood home in the town of El Biar in Algeria. The mislaid pattern of the tile breaks the arrangement of the paved floor. At once, it changes the whole coherence of the otherwise harmonious composition of the floor. Here, in the dissymmetry of the scene, one may recognize a *punctum* or a *trait*: a particular "force of radiation" and an "affective and unconscious expansion."[150] In Barthes's words, the *punctum* is a "detail [that] is offered by chance and for nothing,"[151] an element that will "break (or punctuate) the *studium*": it is "an element that rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me."[152] The *punctum* may not be sought purposely, since either it takes place in the image or it does not; it escapes from the eyes of the spectator as soon as it vanishes from the image. This makes the *punctum* and the *trait* unanalyzable as such.[153] In Derrida's terms, being beyond meaning, their existence is close to the function of *différance*.

Photograph and the Disappearance of Form

Derrida's theory of the photograph brings a specific viewpoint to the question of form. Earlier, the theories of Formalism suggested that one of the meanings of "form" points to the intrinsic and true form of art. The Derridean criticism of form is thus also the criticism of the truth, insofar as "truth" is taken to mean the concept that defines the essence of a thing or a figure. If we suppose that Derrida is searching the possibility of photographic image outside the figure, the discussion leads to ideas of trace and *trait*: they cannot be made a figure of, but stand for the possibility of the birth of a figure or form.[154]

In the photograph, the absence of the photographed object and its presence in the image are not simply opposites. They rather include each other's possibility: the retreat of form and of the visible. With this, Derrida brings out that the form or figure in the photograph is neither a permanent thing nor that it would exist anywhere before the image. Rather, the photographic image appears according to the changing relations between light and shadow that

form the surface of the photograph. Being in the photograph is not being there; on this matter, Derrida inquires: "Why does it [the clarity of the night] seem not only to come out and proceed from the night, as if black gave birth to white, but to still belong to the shadow, to remain yet *in the heart* of the dark abyss from which it emanates?"[155] In the essay "*Aletheia*," he states that the origin of light evades from vision—visibility itself is invisible and thus dark, and "one has to be blind (immersed *in the dark*) to see," and the law of "the phenomenon of light (*phôs*) is inscribed in nature (*physis*) from the beginning. Like a history of the eye."[156] Therefore, he argues that the laws of photography are in the nature.

The theme of haunting, hallucinations, and specters belong to this scheme of absence that is present at the same time. The fact that the photographed figure is present in the image while it is always already absent from the time and place where the photo was taken gives Derrida reason to see a similar structure in paintings. He argues that they are like projections: in *The Truth in Painting*, the shoes painted by van Gogh are like van Gogh *himself*, the painter absently present in the image. As such, he is inseparable from himself—Derrida refers to the title of van Gogh's painting *Hoc est corpus meum* as if it made visible the words with which the Christian Communion is given: "(Take, eat;) this is my body. (Do this as a commemoration of me)."[157] In Meyer Schapiro's opinion, Heidegger has an identificatory problem with the painting: he has annexed the shoes to his social landscape and "imagined everything and projected it into the painting."[158] Therefore, Derrida concludes, it is a hallucination, a hallucination in painting. To say this raises the question whether painting has to let a discourse be applied to it that was elaborated elsewhere, a discourse on hallucination. Or else must painting be the decisive test of that discourse, and its condition? Further, what are the limits of projection? "What is an experience without projection?" Derrida asks.[159] The projection of meaning as nothingness is in van Gogh's painting without being present in it.[160] As it seems, the presence of the projection as specter of another truth of the painting implies the thought of groundlessness: instead of being an image *of* something, the painting and the photograph are perhaps images that exist without what they are images "of," or they are images of nothing. The reference of the image has to be projected and hallucinated. Being images of nothing, they represent nothing, which means that they do not have an available form or concept.

For the reason that the referent is always absent from the image, Derrida calls photography *skiagraphia*, "the writing of shadows," rather than the "writing of light." Apart from photography, also other arts seem to be to him varieties of *skiagraphia*.[161] The seeing implied by *skiagraphia* does not include "clear vision" that corresponds to the "intelligible place" to which the soul turns its gaze in Plato's *Republic*, but rather the shadows drawn

on the cave's wall like echoes.[162] This makes representation of an idea or figure impossible; one can never see the entire image.[163] *Skiagraphia*, the art of shadows, as the principle of the visible brings blindness in place of visibility: nothing becomes visible without the existence of the invisible. This idea differentiates Derrida's theory from phenomenology that studies the way in which phenomena appear to us in perception. Their appearing presupposes the immediate presence of things and the direct, "brute" perception of them—even if in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy especially, the relation between the visible and the invisible becomes more complicated.[164]

With his analysis, Derrida attempts to exit the paradigms of seeing and light that generally work as metaphors of truth. In "Restitutions" in *The Truth in Painting*, he wants to discover whether Heidegger tries to seek the truth of the image in the philosophy of art or in a concept, something that Derrida deems to be impossible.[165] Therefore, he searches the image outside of the figure or form: in the trace, *trait*, and difference. However, these cannot be made a figure of or to discern their form, because trace and difference are the possibility of the *birth* of the figure or form.

In the photograph, things do not have a form, but the photographic image appears according to the alternation between shadow and light, between the visible and the invisible. As such, the image is a surface composed of oppositions and differences. One is able to see things because there are differences between the elements on the surface of the image. As such, it might be possible to perceive the photograph even as a model for *all* the arts in Derrida's philosophy, drawing and painting included. The photograph now appears to be paradigmatic for him in what concerns the bringing forth of differences in thinking of the meaning of image: in the black-and-white photograph, this differentiation is clearer than in perhaps any other art. Among the arts, the black-and-white photograph comes closest to the scheme of writing in how it makes oppositions and differences in the scale of light and darkness appear. This is true even if the differences do not permanently belong to the image, but they open each system of meanings to its outside—that is, they proliferate when, in the context of other differences, the influence on the way in which things are understood.[166] The truth that we are speaking of is the truth of truth. This, of course, means that the force of "truth" opens onto an abyss.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF PAINTING

Together with drawing and photography, painting forms the third paradigm of art in Derrida. In thinking about the contemporary questioning of painting, one of the most compelling topics that arises from his theory is whether

painting still possesses an identity that differentiates it from other areas of fine arts. In exploring this problem, Derrida goes even further: he inquires if painting has really ever had an essence. His doubt toward any essential thinking on painting is grounded in the idea that painting, as all arts, is a form of text that can be examined by employing deconstructive strategies. This means that claims about art may be analyzed critically and studied as assumptions and arguments on "art," the "work of art," or "painting." In speaking about painting, Derrida's aim is obviously not to reconcile with any form of iconographic discourse, such as "representation," or "figurative," or "abstract" art. How to describe the challenge that his theory makes visible, or to respect painting that is itself silent, without words? Can we respond to its appeal for words, and, at the same time, resist the allure of naming and describing it? These questions touch upon the possibility to discuss the singularity of the painting and allow its discursive framework to remain unlimited, to expand this framework without being constrained by earlier categories, either conceptual or practical.[167]

Even if the background for Derrida's discussion is deeply philosophical and motivated by the aims deconstruction, his ideas of painting are still relevant especially if we look at the situation of the time of publication of *The Truth in Painting*, the 1970s, and afterward. This time is marked by the growing need to create theories of art that would respond to the development of painting and other fine arts: unlike in modernism, a painting is often no longer a delimited object with a recognizable "painterly form" or identity that would belong exclusively to painting. Indeed, painting has been declared dead at least twice: first, at the invention of photography in the 1830s when the painterly expression suddenly seemed defunct, and in the 1910s, when Marcel Duchamp privileged ideas over visuals.[168] To overcome its state of being "finished," the concept and practice of painting have constantly expanded: since the 1960s, "painting" has perhaps implied primarily a strategy of working, with a changing praxis. The current term "extended painting" refers to the broadening of the scope of painting by adopting unconventional techniques and materials that often are not compatible with the modernist idea of flatness and framed surface. What is called painting may resemble a sculpture, installation, made of textiles or maybe of words on the Internet. This extension gives a challenge to philosophy and theories of painting: how to deal with painting that is more and more multifaceted?

In the history of art and especially in theories associated with modernist art, painting has been the prime example of the "fine arts" and generally offered their paradigm.[169] This, as it appears, is reflected in the position that painting holds as example in theories of the visual arts. Derrida wrote the core of his theory of painting in the course of the 1970s, at a time when the earlier forms of art had been in a state of change for more than a decade

and new forms had emerged. By the mid-1970s, the forms of painting, however, had not distanced from the "classical" concept of painting yet, but the majority of painters still worked with conventional shapes and techniques. Derrida's will to put into question the limits involved in the modernist concept of painting thus hardly stems directly from the plurality of the painterly practices of his time, at least not merely. Later, especially after the 1980s, painting has assumed new forms and has expanded to spatial installations. Also, the employment of the traditional materials does not define the painting any longer: what refers to the practice of painting may consist of materials that have nothing to do with the applying of color on canvas, paper or other kinds of two-dimensional ground; paintings may consist of textile, ready-made objects, and digital codes. "Painting," as a category, probably still refers to a certain tradition that still provides it with significance in contemporary art.

More than an artistic form with practices that would belong to it exclusively or even a manner of presenting things with paint, at the present painting refers to a habit of working. It is a medium of expression, not in the sense that depends on the use of paint but rather in the sense of "gesture" as in Giorgio Agamben, or in terms of writing and the *trait* in Derrida.[170] However, gesture and writing do not point to the concrete actions of the artist or to the visible traces of color. They rather imply what makes possible the painterly acts, namely the gestures that are required to produce a painting. They include the abstract conditions around painting such as its discourses and practices in society. As a consequence of these elements, painting itself may be understood as a gesture, too.

In Derrida's discussion on painting, medium-specificity is one of the emerging themes. At the time of writing *The Truth in Painting* and even long before it, the renouncing of medium-specificity was already a commonly accepted practice in artistic work. Yet, the shift from medium to expression is not only a recent development. Already at the time of early collage art in the 1910s and especially after the heyday of modernist painting, there has been a constant inclination among artists to expand the field of painting. Early cubist painters added pictures, texts from newspapers and occasionally even small objects into their works, so that the limit between collage and painting was not clear any longer. This is visible in paintings by Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, André Breton, and Kurt Schwitters. In the 1950s, artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Edward Kienholz, Jasper Johns, and Jean Dubuffet began to make assemblages, in which they added three-dimensional objects to the substrate that was usually a painted ground. Similarly, other kinds of mixed techniques were employed in paintings more and more often since the 1950s and 1960s in works that combined painted surface with ready-made pictures and objects, photograph, drawing, print,

film, and sculptural elements. In the present, instead of medium-specificity, one finds site-specific works of art, primarily installations, that are created for a single space. In the interaction and inseparability of the viewer, the environment and the artist's work, site-specificity emphasizes the singularity of the resulting ensemble.

Being no longer restricted to the use of paint and flat surface, painting has thus assimilated new inventions into itself: materials, media, and methods of working. Its forms have changed from two-dimensional to three-dimensional, and the proportions of painting are more and more varying; painting lends materials and methods from other arts and has expanded to what was previously considered to belong to their realm. Beginning from the assumption that all instances of art are different and therefore singular, the possibility of formulating coherent, general theories of art proves a highly controversial goal for a deconstructionist philosopher.

Against the background of expanding practices of art, in Derrida's discussions painting is a disseminating concept: the practices of painting diffuse into their contexts constantly, instead of having any permanent idea or essence. To begin from the assumption that all meanings depend on the context, it seems that in painting they are dependent on the use of color in space. For Derrida, color appears to be the most decisive attribute of painting: in its materiality, color is singular, irreducibly local and therefore its perception remains unique, for no immaterial, purely conceptual color exists. Color is always attached to a concrete, particular ground; hence, there is no yellow "in general," but only the radically unnameable locality of color. It follows that the task of painting is to show its own color that cannot be assimilated into any discourse of art or into the language of any logical argument.

For Derrida, instead of autonomy given by the artistic medium, what we understand as art necessarily depends on the multiple frameworks that surround the works of art—the contexts that allow something to be treated as art. As its framework is never stable and determinable, it cannot provide any final coherence to what belongs to art either. However, art, as an instance of writing, *does* have autonomous value in Derrida. It differs from other phenomena of culture—from other texts—in that it has a special function: unlike everything else, art exposes its own exposition, or shows that it is showing something.[171] Art thus has an ontology of its own, but its identity as a concept and practice is open-ended.

The Death of Art and the Expansion of Painting

The publication of Derrida's *Truth in Painting* in 1978 took place at a time when the debate concerning "the end of art," and in specific, "the death of

painting," gained popularity and even became one of the central themes in art philosophical and art theoretical discussions. As it is commonly known, the concepts of the "end" or, in recent accounts, even the "death of art" were inspired by G. W. F. Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (1820–1821/1835). According to Hegel's claim, art had until now manifested the truth of religion and philosophy. This service of the true, however, had ended, being merely "a thing of the past": "[A]rt no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual needs which earlier ages and nations sought in it, and found in it alone. . . . [A]rt, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. . . . Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is."[172]

According to Hegel, art, like history, ends when its end or *telos* becomes achieved. He declared not only the end of art but also the end of religion and the end of history. That what ends is what philosophy discloses as the meaning of art: a process toward the full comprehension of art, its "vocation" or the "truth" of its concept in modernity. In the course of historical development, the task of art has been fully realized, as Hegel understands it. Empirically, art has not disappeared and will not do so, but still attempts to come to its "perfection" in works of art that are being produced.[173] For Hegel, art has exhausted because its choices have been rendered arbitrary: art has now become "a free instrument" and nothing "stands in and for itself above this relativity" any longer.[174]

Hegel's thesis on the "end of art" stated art's coming to an end as philosophical reflection or political program. The end appears in the theories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a permanent, omnipresent figure of thought.[175] This statement has been used in situations where the sphere of autonomous art has shown to be in danger. This was obviously the case when the position of painting, the modernist art form *par excellence*, was "threatened" by the emergence of new practices of art that expanded to both time and space, to conceptual and ephemeral presentations that appropriated from different forms of life and the media of other arts.

Obviously, theoreticians have interpreted the "end of art" with the occasional purpose of promoting certain art forms instead of more traditional ones like painting and classical sculpture. These may have seemed "things of the past" especially at the time when new practices began to emerge in art in the late 1960s and 1970s.[176] Although Hegel does not speak about the "death" of art as such, it is probably right to say that Hegel has initiated a *discourse* of the end of art, which has proved to be indispensable for modernist theories of art.[177] The proclamations of a new, repeated "end" leads to the multiplicity of an end and therefore to its essential singularity. This became visible first in Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades. Instead of presenting crafted artifacts,

Duchamp's works of art were equal to theory and philosophy: "Art has been thought through to the end."[178] Although the concept of the "end of art" has proved controversial, its influence is indisputable in the sense that the discussion of the "end" of art has reached later the position as one of the core concepts of modernity.[179]

The notion of the "death of painting" relies on certain assumptions, to which Derrida's discussion in *The Truth in Painting* reacts insofar as it concerns the frame and the medium of painting and their limits: what can painting assimilate into itself, and does painting have a true meaning or essence? It is possible to understand the meaning of painting in a dual manner.[180] In the 1960s, painting began to appear increasingly as an institution of the past, largely because it was associated with the tradition of modernism and a medium with formalist intentions. However, as noted above, even long before formalist theories, painting has existed as a hybrid art form, which has fused into itself other art forms and media, such as drawing with graphite, charcoal, and color pens and prints. Therefore, questioning the limits of painting would have been a possible issue even before the modernist era, during which the defense of such limits attained a political status, as the purity of each art form became an ideal. Clement Greenberg described medium-specificity as "the unique and proper area of competence," for a form of art corresponds with the ability of an artist to manipulate those features that are "unique to the nature" of a particular medium.[181] Especially in contemporary practices and theories, the situation is the opposite: painting represents diversity and even limitless expansion rather than the exercise of preconceived methods and materials. From this thinking has followed that extending the supposed limits is more of a norm in an artist's work than keeping to such restrictions.

Associated with the expansive potentiality of painting, Derrida evokes the question about its theoretical and philosophical means of overcoming the hierarchies and categories of modern aesthetics. For Derrida, Kant was the first philosopher to formulate these categories in his Analytic of the Beautiful. If for Kant the fundamental problem of aesthetics concerned the nature of the judgment of beauty, the central question of the twentieth-century aesthetic theories is rather "is it art?"[182] This means that the viewpoint has shifted from aesthetic values to the ontology of art. Accordingly, Derrida takes an interest in the limits involved in theorizing art and painting in specific. This implies the consideration of the validity of the limits in each system of interrogation, in particular as they appear in the Kantian analysis. Derrida argues for a philosophy of art where the aesthetic value, the hierarchies between the different media, techniques and methods of artistic presentation and the status of particular art historical eras and styles and artists lose their conventional significance. In Derrida, art philosophical concepts, such as mimesis,

representation and the form of art, become subjects of critical inquiry and are even "overcome" in a manner that is comparable to the "overcoming of aesthetics," suggested by Heidegger. However, Derrida does not reject the concepts and earlier limits imposed by modernist theories but recognizes their potential as objects of philosophical interest, namely deconstruction.

When speaking about drawings, Derrida characterizes their possibility and signification as perpetual extension in a historical configuration, which equally applies to painting. What we need, he says, is a "new experience of representation and figuration, of line [*trait*] and technique, and also other institutions are required, other forms of experimentation and of learning [*apprentissage*], new ways of sharing knowledge, new original paths between different disciplines, . . . the engagement of one's body, of mediation or technical reproducibility, the idiomatic gesture and applied arts, brilliant inventions and market—both national and international."[183] In addition to such extensions, drawing (*dessin*) has always been more than drawing, having at once the meanings of "*dessiner, designer, signer, enseigner*"—"to draw, design, sign, teach." Thus, to name something a "drawing" necessarily calls forth a number of linguistic associations, as Derrida seems to argue. The phonetic appearance, or the form, of *dessiner* and its phonetically associated words offer one possible framework for what "drawing" suggests. However, these words are not the only alternatives, but he might have cited a number of other words, in other languages, or rhyming words, for example. The frame proves therefore to be a moving framework. Derrida's inquiry diverts from modern notions of art, which rely upon the content of art itself; instead, he refers to the language used of art and the possibilities it offers, which form the core of deconstructionist, or more widely, the "postmodern" view on art.

Derrida's ideas of drawing seem to be related to painting in a notable way. Although—or perhaps for the reason that—the realm of drawing is theoretically closer to Derrida's philosophy than painting in the ability to produce differences, drawing makes visible the ambivalence inherent to painting: its materiality that seems to posit the limit of philosophy. This ambivalence belongs primarily to the instability within the discourse that painting engenders, and the multiplicity of the frames, or of the conceptual limits, of painting.

In exploring the limits of painting, Derrida proposes two intertwined solutions to it: first, he aims at capturing the theoretical means by which painting may "overcome" its discourse and the restraints of its own economy; second, painting always already means to him the overcoming of its restrictions that are imposed upon it in attempts to determine what painting is. These ideas draw upon other inquiries about the theoretical or philosophical ways: how

does painting "overcome" itself and its own economy? Alternatively, is painting something that is always bound to overcome its own practice?

Painting and Language: (Anti)aesthetic Art

In the recent few decades, Hegel's claims about the universality of the concepts of "art" and "the aesthetic" have raised severe criticism especially among philosophers such as Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jean-François Lyotard, and Paul de Man. In their criticism to Hegel's and other aesthetic systems, their inclination is predominantly anti-aesthetic. For Derrida, the anti-aesthetic position entails primarily the rejection of the role of beauty in art. More generally, the anti-aesthetic means the disdain of the idea that art should be visually pleasing to be appreciated.[184] If in the aesthetic position the emphasis is on visual affect or pleasure, in the anti-aesthetic view other aims of art are more important, such as its critical or political values. From an anti-aesthetic perspective, aesthetics does not need to be a necessary aspect of art at all.

That Derrida's focus is on the anti-aesthetic rather than the aesthetic becomes obvious in the importance that he attaches to the notion of art as a site of producing differences that are non-conceptualizable and imperceptible as such. Something becomes visible only because the artistic expression at once implies something invisible and absent that eludes the sphere of the purely sensuous. Therefore, the aesthetic feeling, or the feeling of the beautiful proposed by Kant, would not offer any essential criteria for the ontology of art. Derrida's interrogation of art and the aesthetic extends beyond both mimesis and the Kantian tradition of the aesthetics of beauty: according to his argument in *The Truth in Painting*, this system has never been solid enough to delimit the sphere of the aesthetic feeling.[185] Consequently, the sensuous rather withdraws in the experience and allows space to the intelligible, thereby giving way to the element of the anti-aesthetic or even anaesthetic in the experience of art. What presents itself as the object of (an)aesthetic inquiry finally appears as ambiguous: the sensible in art retreats when it is exposed to thinking. Thus, for Derrida there is always ambiguity as to the object of the aesthetic inquiry.[186]

According to Hal Foster's well-known definition formulated in the early 1980s, "anti-aesthetic" puts in question the very notion of the aesthetic and its network of ideas.[187] "Anti-aesthetic" is the sign of a critique which destructures the order of representations in order to reinscribe them. Among such orders, there is the idea that aesthetic experience exists apart, without "purpose" or beyond history, or that art can now effect a world at once (inter)subjective, concrete and universal—that is, a symbolic totality. The core of the discussion on the anti-aesthetic is to deny the idea of a privileged

aesthetic realm. By emphasizing the meaning of the frame and art's dependence on its context, Derrida takes into consideration the practices of the cultural forms that condition art and the realm of the aesthetic. By doing so, he opens the possibility of their political stakes, which is evident especially in "Restitutions," in which two "competing" discourses are put into play.

Generally, there seems to be consensus on Derrida's philosophy of art: its object is neither art itself nor aesthetic research.[188] Instead, he seems to be writing about the philosophy's possibility to approach art, or rather, to define the framework of both art and its theory beginning from what makes the thinking on art possible. However, both works of art and theories are untouchable: what determines them is for Derrida a matter of endless definitions that, in turn, are dependent on their contexts. Thus, access to the very essence of art proves elusive and inaccessible.[189]

How language and art belong together and differ from each other is a critical question in assessing the significance of painting. What Ann Van Sevenant suggests is that the "disjointed" (*le disjoint*) or the "disjunction" (*le disjonction*) is even the key to understanding the work of art, in which separate elements are brought together, as different forces are at work in a work of art, creating simultaneous reunion and tension.[190] The noncoincidence between the heterogeneous elements thus keeps the work together: Van Sevenant's argument is based on Derrida's statement, according to which "the disjointed now forms a work."[191] This is reflected in the notion that the discourse on painting and the painting itself are separate from each other, even if art attracts words and words need images, as Derrida points out.[192] Therefore, the disjoining becomes the work of art; yet, as Van Sevenant remarks, it remains to be inquired at which point this "becoming work" happens exactly, especially if a work of fine art or painting is at issue.[193] In Derrida's notion of the aesthetic, neither the written word nor painting or drawing holds a privileged position. Their spheres remain conceptually separate and yet they are interdependent: for example, drawing is often in the "ground" of painting. In the aesthetic experience, the difference becomes more tangible than elsewhere, when in its quasi-completion, each word and each sentence takes on a heterogeneous meaning.[194] The disaccord is, thus, what joins philosophy and art, which reveal to be untranslatable into each other's way of expression, so that they are necessarily spoken in many ways and are originally always already disjointed.[195] Derrida's view differs from the "traditional" aesthetics in that the unity of the work of art becomes radically questioned in it, which leads to the loss of the work's supposed theoretical unity.

However, to approach art verbally and to make it thus available to the reader's mind and to philosophical argumentation remains a pertinent question to Derrida. The breach between words and painting opens in his consideration

of what description of art is. Standing in front of a painting, the spectator is exposed to it, and the problem of producing a verbal analysis arises:

> Besides, how to describe it? Allow me to make here the economy of a long theoretical but ironic discourse on the description of painting. This is to think that some people dare or pretend to do this, describe, sketch any description of a painting! It is always impossible, it should be forbidden to describe a painting, to "record" it, otherwise than by ordering: go and listen to this painting which is no longer a painting, which no longer has the soothed stability of a painting, hear its spell, its prayer, its demands or its commandments (like an imperious painting sometimes resembles a table of the law), vibrate with the vibration of its call, and then see, if you can, these lines, these traits, these bands, these knots, these dance steps. They efface and highlight, they make the colors emerge to pass the words by going round them, they are made to do without words by passing them, they are made to do without words that, however, they call forth.[196]

In observing Jean-Michel Atlan's paintings, Derrida sees an urgency in their "commandment," even if the call were a quiet one. It demands one to speak, but how should one voice the painting, if not by attempting to change it into the language? Mere description and explanation, which Derrida sees as "recording," are clearly not enough—by "description," he probably understands the accounting for the visible elements and the subject matter of the work of art. Instead, Derrida thinks of painting as an imperative, a demand to speak without giving descriptions. It seems that the language evoked by the painting has to be *compelling*, as if the painting forced us to speak: the painting has to command the speaker, and not the opposite: the speaker's task is not to dominate the work by attributing features to it. When speaking about the description of works of art, Derrida does not mention, however, other conventional elements of art criticism: interpretation or the explanation of the meaning of the works, or their evaluation.

That the painting—metaphorically—imposes "orders" upon the spectator and the philosopher gives an equally imperative tone to Derrida's text. The gap between the painting and words must be filled, but each time differently, and no verbal expressions seem to suffice for this—and yet, the painting's imperiousness is unavoidable. In all, in question is what is "put to work in the work of art."[197] Things keep referring to their outside, to something that they themselves are not; for this reason, in another vocabulary, any speech is always reported, and there never exists direct speech.[198] This principle reflects the instability of the frame of the work of art and the possibly unending chains of signification. If we assume this, what *takes place* in the work

is more important and truthful than the faithfulness of representation or even the aesthetic value of the work.

ART AND TRUTH

It is obvious that any "description" of works of art, in the manner of art historical explanations or otherwise, is not Derrida's aim in his analyses. Instead of analyzing the paintings as representatives of their own genre or style, his technique of speaking about paintings is to *show* the reader that art is always in default of its own concept to begin with: no words are enough to describe what is *at work* in the work of art.[199] Hence, proliferating words are needed to speak about the unspeakable truth of art. Such truth differs from the propositional truth or truth as representation of a thing in another format.

Derrida follows Heidegger's statement in *The Origin of the Work of Art* when saying that the truth takes place in the work, but such truth is not restricted to correspondence between the "original" and its "reproduction." Rather, it refers to the taking place of the truth *in* painting itself, *en peinture*, and not truth in discourse or in other art forms.[200] In painting, the materiality is inimitable in the singularity of its details in the context of this painting; as such, it holds truthfulness. Yet a certain kind of material is not limited to a particular painting "itself," but echoes to what is external to it, to the words and other arts that border on the painting; the extension of painting may be called a form of *ecphrasis*.[201] *Ecphrasis* means usually a vivid description, in which one artistic medium attempts to relate with another medium by describing its form and essence. A typical example of the *ecphrasis* is the literary description of a visual work of art by means of words, which includes the shift from one kind of expression to another.[202] In Derrida's theory of art, the principle of *ecphrasis* is constantly at play in the chains of references that any work of art produces—such as Derrida's explanation of Valerio Adami's drawing *Ich*, displaying a fish hanging on a hook with added handwriting and both Adami's and Derrida's signatures: "*Ich*, snatched fish body, foreign body of a word to involve *another language* (Adami often does it) in the play of signatures and the agonistic outbidding speculating on the *I*. Truncated body or overcharged matrix (there are so many in Adami), bait for the Christic phallus (*Ichthys*), track, graph or trace (*Ichnos*) of a voiceless bit."[203] Derrida's wording shows that with their motives and media, works of art resonate with other works and other things that may not be connected directly with one another. Nevertheless, by means of memory and thinking, these can create associations and relations with each other. The force of associations

proves, indeed, unlimited: although there is no representative connection between drawing and writing, a peculiar relation between the visible and the verbal. A drawing is never merely a drawing: by radiating with all its traits, Derrida argues, drawing forms a configuration that stretches toward painting, poetry, and music.[204]

As appears evident in reading *The Truth in Painting* and the essay "Restitutions" in particular, the bearing of Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art* is elemental to Derrida's idea of painting. Already for Heidegger, the work of art was a site in which the "setting-in-work of truth" takes place. This is why all art is "poetry" for him and its essence is "poetizing" (*Dichtung*): "All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, *essentially poetry*."[205] As Heidegger explains, poetry is the saying of truth and the saying of the unconcealedness of beings, in other words, the production of a revelation; for Heidegger, poetry means language that itself is thinking and thus speaks to us.[206] For Heidegger and Derrida alike, the truth springs up from the singular work of art itself: the truth is at work in the work itself, in its material presentation. However, this does not mean that the truth would be present as such, in the sense of availability, but art rather reveals things that are not present in the work itself.[207] However, as Andrea Potestà has remarked, for Heidegger the work of art means primarily an access to the truth of being—as "a distinctive way in which truth comes into being."[208] In Derrida, however, there may be something more to what is required from the truth in art. In a way that resembles his logic of the trace, the truth in art is never given as available, but one must make it available for oneself. In other words, meaningful associations are recognized from what remains *outside* of the work. For him, this "more" that belongs to the truth appears to be the material aspect of art. In painting, it finally seems to mean color, which forms the material support of painting and therefore its necessary condition.

When considering the concept of truth, the core of Derrida's theory is that only the work makes the truth—the form or Idea—appear. Indeed, no ideal form or concept exists before the artist draws a line or applies a layer of paint on the canvas with a brush, each time singularly and in a different composition. If the truth of the work of art cannot be articulated in the form of logical argument, how does the work show us something of its truth? Such truth may be approached only indirectly: in the form of endless references and translations into other means of expression, such as language, however impossible any attempt at translation finally is. On such basis, his claim is that there is no ideal form that could be transformed into and communicated in either literature, poetry, theater, architecture, or sculpture. Every work of art thus instantiates a form that does not exist before the realization of the work: every form we encounter in a work of art exceeds all previous forms.

As Jean-Luc Nancy phrases it, Derrida "neither speaks about art nor does he make art speak."[209] On such a basis, what art shows us is supposed to be outside of logical expression and any words. Because both Derrida and Nancy thus argue for art's irreducibility to pure concepts, they subsequently recognize an irreconcilability between the materiality of the works of art and language: art constantly escapes from the grasp of concepts. For Derrida, the work of art consists of *traits*: it is composed of traces that produce a differing and deferring effect cannot be made a figure of. Because the traces in a painting, or in any other form of art, are outside of the visible sphere, they hardly adapt themselves to phenomenological treatise. Rather, what *remains* from the work—the *parergon*—opens up a point of departure for Derrida in considering the spectral nature of the work of art.[210] The principal forms of art that Derrida examines, namely painting, drawing, and photograph, are all concerned with the *parerga*, the subjectile and the context. In fact, these may be the only possible points of departure for Derrida's inquiry: being faithful to the thought of the context, his discussion concerns the remains (*restes*), or what is left unthought by the history and theorization of art.[211] The work itself is thus not suited to be an object of analysis, as it exceeds every attempt at explication: "Spectral remains and ghostly return: to open the possibility of a divergent discourse on painting (or, more broadly, of art) and to say that the very notion of 'phenomenon' is unable to grasp it—to accommodate it."[212]

According to Derrida's argument, art is a matter of invisible traces and therefore stands outside of all treatment that would make a theory of its *traits*. As I see it, this leads to the thought that art does not offer him any certain knowledge based on verified facts that could be analyzed in a "positive" manner.[213] According to Jean-Michel Rabaté's analysis, Derrida refuses two approaches to aesthetics, namely the sublime and positive aesthetics. The sublime brings with it the "negative aesthetics," or the presentation of the unpresentable, which is part of Lyotard's, Nancy's, and Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophy. While differing from the aesthetics of the sublime, it seems to me that a kind of negative aesthetic still belongs to Derrida's thought: he puts into doubt the mimetic principle that the "thing itself" could be presented. Instead, he brings the idea of the constitutive invisibility of art based on the idea the reception of the work of art is not merely dependent on knowledge received from the senses. Instead, however material the work of art may be as an object, in Derrida it immediately leads to the realm of thinking; therefore, it is more of an object of speculative discussion. The anaesthetic (*anesthésique*) at the core of Derridean aesthetics can be understood as a rupture that "*phenomenologically suspends* contact *in* contact" to the thing, in a way that the suspension of sense creates a touch without touching.[214] The contact is immediately divided into the tactile

experience in general, thus placing the anaesthetic at the heart of aesthetic (*esthésique*) phenomenality. Rather than appealing to either the aesthetic or the anaesthetic dimension, Derrida seems to be thinking of the possibility of a spacing or extension that is not purely sensible nor intelligible; or a "sensation" that at the same time refers to perception and understanding and, perhaps, escapes all knowledge.[215] In other words, the aesthetic object replaces the lack of contact like all technique. This absence of contact is, for Derrida, an anaesthetic moment or insensibility "in and as" sensibility, an ecstasy at the heart of aesthetic *jouissance*.[216]

Derrida addresses the question of the structure of touch extensively in *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*. For Derrida, any contact—or finally, any kind being—becomes possible only in terms of a loss of contact: on the condition that the one who touches keeps a distance to the touched; otherwise, it would not be touching but appropriation. As soon as there is contact, there is the event of spacing in the midst of it: one touches and is touched at the very moment when there is a difference in the core of touch. To touch means thus cutting contact, which is possible in the loss itself in the first place. Derrida names this the abstinence from touch: according to him, there is an articulation that is unable to be articulated by the *ego*, which is capable of touching its heart when addressing it.[217] Similarly, Derrida sees the essence of the aesthetic to be insensibility, something that does not yield itself to perception but takes place *in* and *as* sensibility. As the "thing itself" cannot be touched or determined in experience, also the "thing" in the experience of the aesthetic is finally insensible and beyond our perception. This insensible point is perhaps what transfers the experience to the realm of the *parerga*: the invisible contexts of thinking, language, and chains of signification. This view is in obvious contrast with the traditional art historical truth that is based primarily on the historical development, empirical provenience, and stylistic features of art objects. For Derrida, it is never possible to reveal the true meaning of a work of art in the sense of factual knowledge.

In Martin Heidegger's philosophy of the work of art, "truth" holds a central position that differs from Derrida's account. For Heidegger, the work means primarily a means of access to the truth of Being, of which the work discloses a particular aspect.[218] In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger does not deny that the work can pictorially represent something that exists, nor does Derrida deny it as such. Any "trivial" fact of likeness is not enough to be counted as the truth of the work of art, however.[219] This is shown by Heidegger's example of van Gogh's painting of peasant shoes: what is more important than representation is that the work reveals is *how* the represented object is. From this follows that the work of art is not only imitation of reality: departing from the fact that there is a pair of shoes represented in the painting, the work reveals something more truthful, namely their character—in

the case of the peasant shoes, the character of equipment.[220] This is the truth revealed by van Gogh's painting.

Contrary to Heidegger, painting does not display any truth for Derrida. Painting, like any image, is similar to the concept of writing in Derrida's theory in that they both possess a duplicity: both painting and writing present the truth *in* themselves, but they are nevertheless beyond the scheme of logocentrism.[221] For this reason, the truth must lie in the painting itself, not in the way it represents the truth about any other thing. In the painting the truth exceeds, however, any "adequate" representation, such as the linguistic explication, the philosophical language included. There is no truth to be found in the painting or even projected upon it.[222] As Andrea Potestà words it, the truth in painting means even an illusion to Derrida: "The truth in painting is a trompe-l'œil, an image supposedly present and discursively presentable, a simple projection resulting from the appropriative pathos of metaphysics."[223] This is probably to say that the truth, like the trace and the *trait*, are only differential in essence, and the differences they produce are invisible and mute. Everything in art is beyond words: as little as the visibility of the painting may be thought of beginning from its blindness, as little as its truth can be told and interpreted.[224] If there is "nothing to see" in the work of art, this means that at once something is said about the work, the words lose their connection to it.[225] What he argues is that neither can art, being grounded in the invisible, be made a theory of, nor may a logical truth of the invisible be sought. Rather, the deconstruction of painting points to the idea that, instead of a unified and totalizing dominance of significations in each work and artistic genre, the spectator is left with only the ruins of such sense and signification.[226] Derrida is hence seeking a kind of original deconstruction that would always carry the work beyond all the meanings of all the intentions of each work.

Jean-Luc Nancy's standpoint to the question of truth recognizes both Derrida's and Heidegger's notions. As Nancy points out, art is a matter of contact between disparaging *traits*.[227] It is impossible to make sense of such *traits* that are instances of writing; it is likewise impossible to tell the truth about a work of art. Despite this, Nancy also maintains that art is somehow the place for the Heideggerian "setting-itself-to-work of truth" (*Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit*).[228] Heidegger adopts a view in which the essence of art is to be the bearer of the happening of truth, while the truth is never present in the work. However, he opposes the notion of the "truth" of the work of art, if the truth is understood as imitation or representation of reality. In this, Derrida's view is congruent with Heidegger's: for Derrida, art does not possess any "positivist" sense in that its "true" essence could be disclosed in the manner of art history or any researchers of art in general may attempt. The work of art perhaps reveals something

of itself, but what is revealed is never a single truth of the work. Derrida thus turns his eyes to the unthinkable "remains" (*restes*), *parerga* and the subjectiles of the work, as only they enable oneself to approach the work, obliquely, as he questions the possibility of any direct speech of art.[229]

In other words, one of the keys to Derrida's exploration of the work of art is his remark that the work itself cannot be articulated by any means of rational research. The work of art remains fundamentally without signification, which is always postponed with respect to the experience and a matter of thinking. Obviously, this fact is related to Derrida's figures of blindness and the mute speech: what art shows to us is not what we logically and literally conceive in the work, or what we directly observe in it "as such." As has been brought out above, blindness and muteness are undoubtedly metaphors for the fundamental disparity between the visible and the verbal in Derrida.[230] His notion of that originates from its power to suggest things by means of the invisible: associations and veiled meanings that one has to *make* available beginning from the painted surface, rather than merely apprehend denotational meanings.

The Truth in Color?

According to one of Derrida's main ideas, it proves impossible to transform art and its experience into any linear language or expression of rational knowledge. Art is, therefore, akin to poetry, in which meanings come into existence by means of coincidences and accidental encounters between things, both inside and outside of the work. In art, what remains outside of the reach of concepts and definitions is, in the final instance, its materiality. Yet, it exceeds the limits of sensuous perception and evokes thinking.[231] In his deconstruction of art, Derrida seeks the "ruins" of sense and significations at the very moment that they claim to master the work and to give a total, unified picture of it. Rather, is it that the signification always comes to a point of exhaustion in explicating each work, something that applies to every aesthetic regime and system of art?[232] In Derrida, the work of art appears as a trace and an empty place for the birth of sense, a place for opening that can be likened with his discussion of *différance* and *khôra*, notions that arise from his discussion of language. The force and enigma of both art and language appear in an openness: the work leaves us a trace of its possible sense without adhering to any single, definite meaning.

Even if the specificity of the painterly medium is not Derrida's focus in his discussion of painting, from the viewpoint of color it can be argued that painting is, nevertheless, the most medium-specific of the visual arts for him: painting necessarily needs a ground on which color presents itself. Since a color is always attached to a material ground, no color exists as pure

abstraction. Therefore, color is never convertible to pure thinking. Color appears as a kind of *sine qua non* of painting and its minimal condition. In the essay "De la couleur à la lettre" ("From Color to the Letter"), Derrida analyzes color beginning from the scheme of the *trait*, namely as production of differences and qualities of paintings, where "[t]hings get complicated, they become thicker and darker, even turn black sometimes."[233] Such complexity and thickness makes painting fundamentally different from drawing.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida treats the meaning of color by reading Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (1781). In its chapter "On Melody," Rousseau writes on painting and of an analogy between painting and music. He gives color a supplementary function in painting: "Beautiful, subtly shaded colors are a pleasing sight; but this is purely a pleasure of the sense." As such, he says, "Colors entail no interest or feeling at all"; instead, the drawing—that is, the imitation—is what "gives life and spirit to these colors."[234] This means that painting such as Rousseau analyzes it only operates through the sign and is effective through imitation. Art being mimetic, everything in it therefore signifies. Yet, what signifies in art and thus affects us are not things as in nature but signs. Painting supplements Nature and works through cultural signs, not through natural objects that, in turn, affect us through sensations. In drawing, the contours imitate and thus signify the represented object, whereas color is merely an addition to the delineation.

The supplementarity of color and its subordination to line, with the wider question of supplement, ties Derrida's reading of Rousseau to the *parergon* in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.[235] In this reading form and matter are opposed as the basis of aesthetic judgments. In other words, this is to inquire whether material substance, such as color that appeals to sensation, or formal composition or construction is the essence of aesthetic judgments.[236] As Craig Owens has remarked, Kant's *parergon* thus follows the same logic as Rousseau's supplement: it is never part of representation but only added to it.[237] Like color in Rousseau, the *parergon*, such as the frame of a painting, is marginal to the work itself; yet, they may fulfil a lack in the work. The function of the supplement and the *parergon* is to mark the limit between the inside and the outside of the work of art.[238] What equally unites the supplement and the *parergon* is that, as limit, they are infinitely divided and never an object of sensation in itself. In this respect, they resemble Derrida's idea of the trace.

For Derrida, the color makes a difference, which is comparable to the difference produced by the *trait*.[239] Like art and language, color and the *trait* are inseparable, and yet the "graphic apparatus" and the "gush of color" remain autonomous.[240] Within the painting, the color transforms its "program," and leaves "the law of the trait intact in its inky light."[241] However, it is crucial to

Derrida's theory that the *trait* and the color cannot be mixed up. Unlike the *trait* that is pure difference, the chromatic difference opens up an "abyssal problem."[242] The chromatic difference itself is like a *trait*; as such, it is not an object but rather a trajectory (*trajet*) or a trace (*tracé*) that is only taking on a form.[243] The idea of color that is nothing in itself but only the result of a process of formation in a given context opens the question of naming mentioned earlier: how to name a color? How to speak in conceptual terms of color, which never exists only theoretically, but appears *as* something, locally and in perception, and always brings about a material affect? Derrida's question resonates with the impossibility of naming a color that Wassily Kandinsky sees in abstract painting: "When one hears the word red, this red in our imagination has no boundaries. One must, if necessary, force oneself to envisage them."[244] To exemplify this, it is possible to think of a person who is born blind and has never had an experience of colors. It is questionable whether there is any adequate device to describe a color to him or her. In this, a comparison to another thing's color might help, but if it is impossible, we can see that a color has no existence outside of real things and perception of their surface and other qualities.[245]

Often the semiotics of colors depends on the culture where they are used. In different languages, the names given to colors do not fully coincide with another language, nor do the names refer to the same physical colors. Their categorization may vary remarkably: for example, in Greek and Russian, there exist separate names for "dark blue" and "light blue"; in some languages of Papua New Guinea, the colors are classified into merely two groups according to their "warmness" and "coolness"; in some languages of the Amazonas, there are only names for black, white, and red.[246] In English, the range of "ochre" may extend from yellow to brown and red; "teal" is related to blue, green, turquoise, and cyan, while it is not the exact synonym of any of these. Referring to Derrida, on these grounds it is possible to say that color has been named multiple times, but probably it has never been named *definitely*.

The *trait* is not an object for Derrida but rather a trace that is taking form. The *trait* and the trace escape metaphysics in the sense that they are only difference and spacing; therefore, they cannot be defined in the first place.[247] Thus, the *trait* and trace characterize Derrida's idea of the aesthetic that is not conceptualizable. Consequently, it is not possible to turn the work of art into conceptual language either; the work is only the taking form and color. The relation, difference, or distance between them is in the process of *becoming* something; to use Lacoue-Labarthe's terms, it is a variety of "fictioning," or the constitutive role of fiction in the ontological definition of being itself.[248] In Derrida, the painting is located in the space of the difference and inseparation between color and form; a space in which their union in difference

takes place. In the painting, the concrete elements appear only to retreat from vision, so that their differential effect remains in the experience. In Derrida, the vision *touches* on the *traits* of the drawing, which is blind to the one who sees, and the vision proceeds "to the night," to the domain of the yet unseen. Similarly, a blind person touches on the face of another person or a sculpture, and thus gives vision to the touched, who is equally "blind" to the one who does not see.[249]

In the image, heterogeneous forms and colors encounter each other. The effect thus produced is similar to the contact between words and images, the sayable and the visible: they are heterogeneous, but at the same time, in their heterogeneity, they call each other and are finally indissociable from each other. With words, one can only attempt to seize contact with the visible.[250] For Derrida, this notion amounts to a decisive conclusion: the effect produced by the disparate elements is itself beyond visibility and reason; the event of differing between the elements forms the "work."[251] To write about the work of art is an impossible and endless task in which words prove always inconsistent. This point of departure makes Derrida's thinking a philosophy of the invisible in art.

In painting and drawing, both color and the line exist as differential traces. The difference between these paradigms lies in that the trait and its trace in drawing, the line, are invisible, whereas color is visible. For Derrida, drawing is abstract in character in the sense that it is composed of differential *traits*. On the surface of drawing, their traces allow oneself to see the image as if through them or even despite them. It is that the *trait* appears by disappearing: Derrida names drawing "the *withdrawal [retrait] or the eclipse, the differential inappearance of the trait*."[252] The *trait* is in essence an interval that goes beyond the distinction of the intelligible and the sensible.[253] Hence, despite its invisibility, the *trait* is not ideal. Rather, it is divisible and multiplies by bringing about differences—the *trait* separates surfaces and colors in a work of art. Although drawing and painting are both composed of *traits*, drawing differs from painting in that in painting, color has a thickness. Color, in its thickness, offers an example of what remains irreducibly sensible; color is visible without exception, as a color that would only exist conceptually is an impossibility.[254]

In its invisibility, the *trait* resembles an idea.[255] In the concrete drawing, the *traits* appear as lines and tones and values of the traces. They have a differential effect that is, in its barest form, composed of the variation of black and white. The graphic nature (*le graphique*) of the drawing thus unite drawing, the *trait* and the trace ontologically to writing. Like drawing, the painting is for Derrida a domain of imperceptible differential *traits*: in both, the *trait* refers to the spacing brought about the visible marks and traces. In drawing, the *traits* exist as lines, whereas in painting, they arise from the colored

elements and differences between the painted areas. The fact of appearing thus constitutes color ontologically: in the scheme of the painting, its irreducibly sensible and material existence is necessary. From this aspect, painting can hardly be purely inappearing and belong merely to thinking, while at the same time it is composed of graphic, invisible *traits*.

It is worth considering whether painting belongs, in the final instance, to what is destined to remain outside philosophical treatment in Derrida's thinking. Is painting even more radically non-conceptualizable than drawing and photography? Like drawing and photography, painting is composed of invisible differences and, due to the qualities of the colored paint, it is more tangible than the graphic production of differences that belongs to drawings. Ultimately, it seems possible to suggest that painting, in its irreducible materiality, appears as the limit of deconstruction. The thickness, tones, and values of paint are not only metaphorical qualities in speaking about painting. This becomes obvious when considering the changes in the colored surface: they may vary from the use of strong impasto to the areas of bare canvas where no paint has been applied or the ground has been treated in different ways, cut, smeared, burnt, or coated. Depending on surrounding surfaces of color and other material, the minimal changes in tones of paint and other kinds of color can change the appearance of the entire painting.[256]

For Derrida, the character of the graphic unites the ideas of drawing, the *trait*, the trace, and writing. Painting is likewise a domain of invisible, differential *traits*, but it distinguishes from drawing due to the inevitable material visibility of color. Hence, painting presents an element of remainder or *restance* in Derrida's philosophy: the remainder that cannot be reduced to the pure production of differences, which is perhaps the crucial philosophical significance of painting.[257]

Colette Deblé's Graphic Echoes

Derrida gives a "graphic" reading of the visual in his description of Colette Deblé's (b. 1944) wash paintings (*lavis*) that he calls "echographies." Derrida's analysis rests on the observation that Deblé's paintings refer to one another as if echoing each other's contours and colored surfaces that are in many cases monochrome, although to a varying degree. Most often, these works depict shadow-like figures of female bodies. In Derrida's interpretation, repetition and citation are at the origin of Deblé's wash paintings, or watercolors with added techniques. Their forms resemble each other, but unlike in printed works, the patterns employed by Deblé are not similar, so that the works always seem to defer their model or reference.[258] In this manner, they present a citation of what does not precede the citation itself, a quotation giving birth "again" and "for the first time." Repetitiveness is then

at birth: Derrida sees Deblé's bodies of women as "delivered, re-engendered; engendered anew, for the first time."[259] Hence, he remarks that there is no way of discerning what constitutes the "original" image and what its representation. Rather, everything shows to be reproduced from the beginning: Deblé cites representations, *mises en scène* and imprints of women that, in turn, become displaced and modified by "rhetorical tones" and "affective modes" in new paintings.[260] Thus, Deblé's work consists of deconstructing the sense of representation, having no original point of reference in art or reality.

In Derrida's interpretation, Deblé is writing a "feminist history of women," but this happens only *as* images. Derrida's "feminist" analysis is based upon the themes related with sexuality—picture making as a work of labor, and the position of Deblé's art in "paternalistic" history. In it are involved the biblical text of Susanna and the Elders and the countless paintings of this theme in the history of art since the Renaissance.[261] In the story, Susanna is taking a bath in her garden while two lustful elders secretly observe her. Susanna refuses their attempts to approach her physically; afterward, she is blackmailed and falsely accused of promiscuity by the two voyeurs. Susanna, however, escapes the death penalty, as it becomes evident that the accusers are lying. Instead of Susanna, they are executed. Deblé's paintings appear to reflect the theme of bath and water right on their use of material—the element of water—and the painted surface. Derrida sees traces of one's immemorial past in the use of water that evokes echoes of the amniotic fluid.[262] The original, untouchable bodies that exist only in memory can be touched, in the same way as in writing, only in *spectral traces*, which always belong to the element of the past and to memory. The chain of references within Deblé's presented representations proves endless, as is the case of echoes resounding one another.

The effect of repetition is reinforced by Derrida's several references to printing (*empreindre*). Although Deblé does not make prints or otherwise use the methods of graphic reproduction, her paintings evoke the sense of seriality.[263] For Derrida, the seriality of the paintings both engenders and dissolves their singularity, which Deblé achieves through repetition. In addition, Derrida explains, Deblé's strategy is vitally the result of the property of the "through" (*à travers*). She operates by infiltrating color and leaving marks on paper through water, as well as through citations. Such use of material brings to mind the impression of seeing through mirrors.[264] The "through" is Deblé's artistic work as such.[265] She renders things visible due to the "through"—a notion which seems to come close to Derrida's thinking on context and archewriting, which itself could be described as a kind of echography.

There is still another perspective in Derrida's pairing of the visual and the linguistic. In *Prégnances*, Derrida compares Deblé's paintings to photographs or "writing of light" in that they are born as a result of development in liquids.[266] Thus, both Deblé's paintings and photographs have the characters

of revelation and of technical reproducibility. Repetition that belongs to the structure of writing therefore becomes a necessary point of reference in exploring their relation.

On the Border of Anaesthesia: Painting without Painting

The scope of Derrida's "anaesthetic" philosophy of art remains to be inquired. As clarified above, it is anaesthetic, or outside the domain of the sensible, for it is grounded in the imperceptible *traits* and traces in art. Each *trait* and trace have a differential effect in the painting. Their power of creating space for differences is the ontological condition of the work of art and enables the spectator to distinguish between things and allows him or her to have a sense of them. However, as this effect itself conditions experience, it is insensible: it is a singular interruption inscribed in the sensible at a moment when the sensible and the insensible touch upon one another.[267]

It is possible to call Derrida's aesthetics "anaesthetic" because he addresses the interruption beyond the sensible. Therefore, to use Alain Badiou's term, it can be described as rather *inaesthetic*[268] than belonging to the sphere of aesthetics. Derrida's quest is to seek a space for art in the interval between words and art. In the middle of insensible breaks, there remains the insensible "thing." This gap generates the need for more words; they multiply, but as Derrida stresses, they are never reducible to each other's domains. However, one may ask whether in a painting, the color itself is merely a "thing"—is it rather affect or an instance of touch itself? The anaesthetic quality refers, then, to the perception of invisible and thus unsayable differences, an idea that perhaps has contributed to Derrida's willingness to approach the frames of art rather than the visual qualities of the works.[269]

Unlike the *traits* and traces in drawing, in painting their ground seems to be *aesthetic* from the beginning, however. The qualities of paint and any kind of color are *in* the material, which without exception has a ground, a material, physical support underneath the colored surface. Derrida shows that the names for a ground often have the prefix "sub," "under": *le support*, *la substance*, *le subjectile*.[270] The necessity of the ground means that the empirical *union* of the color and the support is inimitable; it is what is unique, and thus rare, in the work. The combination makes the work singular: "[T]he rarity, the non-reproducibility of some foundations (*dessous*), is the condition of both the work of art, of certain types of works of art, and a certain art market—the politics and economy of art."[271] A similar idea appears in Nancy, who speaks about the "locality" belonging to the work of art: each work is composed of a countless number of details, which come together in each time different and unforeseen manner.[272] In the painting, the ground becomes hidden by definition. As I see it, whether it is covered literally by paint or other kind of

color is not essential as such: if the foundation is left visible, it immediately turns into the surface of the painting. What is common to the ground and the frame—the *parergon*, the *hors-d'œuvre*, the supplement aside of the painting—is that they are both inseparable from the work.[273] For that reason, the remainder is part of it, so that the opposition between the ground, the surface, and the frame is deconstructed. Similarly, inside the painting or drawing, the differential *trait* stands outside of oppositions and hierarchies between meaning and form, inside and outside, content and container, signified and signifier, represented and representer.[274] The union of the frame and the support is indispensable in the work: both are inseparable from the work and make it singular and irreplaceable and are detached to the ground—of paper, canvas, wood, stone, metal. The frame and the ground keep the work from being reduced to the visible or legible surface or ground belonging to the form or representation.[275] In Derrida's analysis, only the fact that the material support and the frame are undetachable from the surface guarantees the singularity of the work.

The inimitable and yet repeatable event of painting becomes to the fore in Derrida's discussion of Jean-Michel Atlan's paintings, in which painted words appear frequently. For Derrida, these words appear on the limit of the aesthetic and the anaesthetic: words are "outside of all representation and all anthropomorphism." Hence, "there is perhaps something of the trait or of the letter, something that *ties* the trait *to the* colored *letter*, literally to the letter *of the color*."[276] In looking at the painted letters, Derrida says, things get more complicated; they thicken and even darken at times. There are illiterate chains of letters in Atlan's paintings. The letters join to one another, they are interlaced. However, also by breaking up, by cutting up one another and by disappearing, they create anacoluthons or discontinuities in the sentences. The letters in Atlan's paintings operate by creating differences.

Philosophically, Derrida's theory of painting is above all associated with deconstruction and its aims. Art, understood as a variety of writing, presents itself as the process of infinite referral and of never arriving at meaning itself. However, art differs from other varieties of writing in that art is too complex to be defined, owing to the singularity of its instances, the use of specific media and means of expression. In Derrida's accounts, works of art often form series that produce repetition, which gives them a textual form, while the repetitive features present themselves singularly. It is possible to say that for him works of art are *writing on writing*, a kind of second-order writing, since the visible implies the relation between the legible and the visible (*le lisible et le visible*). As it seems, it might be found at the point where there occurs an abyssal contact between the sensible and the insensible.[277]

Jean-Luc Nancy's deconstructive analysis of language and the visual, or the insensible and the sensible, largely corresponds with Derrida's: in Nancy, the sensible and the insensible are inseparable in their separation when they touch one another in the visible. According to Nancy, there is something legible in visibility of and for itself, and "there is in painting, in the nonpictorial at the very heart of painting, a certain writability or scripturability."[278] Here, he advances that painting itself writes about painting, or produces the practices of painting, something that makes painting itself possible, not the fact that it would fulfil any extrinsic demand applied on painting as a genre.

Although the forms and practices of painting have continued to expand after Derrida, his theory of painting continues to offer an insight into the situation in which the discourses on art appear as insufficient to clarify what differentiates painting from other forms of visual arts. At the same time, the need to define painting has shown to be less and less relevant after the time of modernist theoreticians. Their task was to determine painting and its essence, so that the work of art would correspond in the best possible way to the potential of the medium, as well as comment on and renew the concept of art. Later artists have discarded the requirement to follow the possibilities of a single medium and develop them. According to the modernist notion, the work of art was dependent on the specific medium and the qualities that appeared to be essential to it. Purity was the ideal state of medium-specificity, which meant the work should be uncontaminated by the influence of other media. The thought was that the concept of painting would somehow be completed by using its autonomous force that communicates nothing outside of its self-contained properties. Several theorists have contested this idea later. Art historian W. J. T. Mitchell, for example, argues that painting is dependent on language without exception: representational painting involves a narrative, whereas abstract painting has historically been dependent on theory. To explain the picture, words are thus always needed; following Richard Rorty, Mitchell calls this development "the linguistic turn," or the emphasis on discursive representations of the world. However, according to Mitchell, "the linguistic turn" is connected with and even dependent on what he calls "the pictorial turn," something that he claims to have taken place in the postmodern reality: the shift to the nonlinguistic, to images, visible symbols and material traces.[279] Although Mitchell perceives a rift between the linguistic and the pictorial, these spheres are profoundly inseparable from each other.[280] In this sense, his view corresponds with Derrida's and Heidegger's ideas on the relation between the discursive and the visible.

From a specific angle, the notion of the pictorial turn also belongs to Derrida's theory in that he emphasizes the existence of material traces in the different fields of writing. This is essential in order to understand his relation to the realm of the aesthetic and shows his inclination toward an ontological

account of art: the mere reference to the senses, such as vision, does not suffice to account for the experience of art that is always "blind," nor is it enough to construct an ontology of art.

Even though the requirement of the purity of the medium and medium-specificity is no longer valid for a large number of artists and theorists, it is true that many artists are still committed to a particular medium—such as painting. Yet, the difference to the former ideas is that after the theoretical and practical changes in the 1960s, the use of a single medium does not provide a condition for what is conceived of and presented as painting. Examples are provided by the work of artists from the early twentieth century to the present: Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys, Louise Bourgeois, Mike Kelley, Sophie Calle, Olafur Eliasson, Tino Sehgal, among numerous others. Examples include works of art realized in collage techniques, assemblages, the mixing of artistic techniques such as printmaking, sculpture, digital images, and sound, the addition of materials on canvas, plastic, metal, or wood, or the fabrication of colored surfaces in whatever material. Although painting has taken on new forms, there still exists a practice called "painting." In the continuous process of expansion, the questions of "what is painting?" or "what is art?" may nevertheless be valid from the point of view of artistic practices, contexts, and experience. However irrelevant the questions that aim at defining art are from Derrida's perspective, it seems that they are implicitly present in his philosophy. Even if it proves to be impossible to speak *about* works of art, it is possible to approach their frame, namely the discourses that surround the work of art in a specific situation.

Derrida's contribution to the state and position of painting in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is multiple in that it has created a philosophical cadre to it from the viewpoint of deconstruction. The results have resonated in countless other art philosophical theories and both directly and indirectly to the practices of artists. Although Derrida is tied to the aims of deconstruction, his thinking on art and especially painting has undoubtedly resonated with the growing tendencies and contributed to them, not only in philosophy but also in art and culture, most visibly in the purpose to collapse earlier limits. In one part, this development originates from the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s, when it was acknowledged that the consumption of culture was not any longer intended for limited social classes and the institutions that supported them. Art broke away from the gilded frames both philosophically and in practice as the position of art institutions, such as museums and galleries, was criticized for their isolation and social segmentation, and artists approached the quotidian experiences and problems in a new way.

Especially at the present, Derrida's text reflects the difficulty of philosophy and any kind of theory to approach art. During the past two decades, a general theoretical shift has occurred: from the ontology of art that still was

in the focus of poststructuralist thinking, several theorists and artists have turned their attention to what was previously seen to belong to the margins of art, namely to phenomena that surround its practices. Among these are institutional criticism, the social environment of art, economy, and labor. Accordingly, in artistic frameworks such as the painting, constant "expansion" and "extension" seem to be relevant, or at least logical, strategies at a moment when art refers to various ways of becoming of art.[281] From this perspective, Derrida's question on whether art has ever existed presents itself as relevant. It is possible to conclude that Derrida's theory reacts to a situation where significations have been exhausted and when discourses occasionally appear to overshadow the works of art. Therefore, his writing emerges from the regime in which the work is a site of opening and where the remnant materiality of the work and the effect it engenders beyond all meanings and intentions are at the core.

The Ontological Politics of Art: The Work as Installation

The underlying ethos in Derrida's discussion of painting's singular, idiomatic expression seems to be focused on painting's ability to surpass its own limits. This happens both within the painting itself in how the spectator receives and completes its withdrawing colored appearance, and in the larger context of painting as a practice with a fleeting identity. Painting, as it appears in *The Truth in Painting* that was first published in 1978, belongs to a time when it no longer was as institutionally regulated as previously. Experimentation is typical of practices such as expanded painting and installation art, in which inventions and the search of novel forms are of importance. Part of the problem of avant-garde art is thus involved in them: as soon as anything that relates to the aesthetics of experimentation is presented, does it lose its position as experimentation? Can a work of art be novel and groundbreaking after it has assumed a certain artistic figure, in a situation when it has made its contribution to the new understanding of what, for example, painting and installation are? This question raises the general problem inherent in avant-garde art, namely does every presentation related to "experimental aesthetics" finally assimilate the revolt in itself, and is there a possibility for artistic presentations to maintain their novelty as soon as the revolutionary expression has assumed a definite figure—as soon as they become accessible by words?

Art is a primary example of what exceeds any given concept; for Derrida it may be the most important example of this.[282] The fundamental disparity between the visible and the verbal is reflected on the contemporary notion of "expanded painting," which, as I see it, has adopted the excess of its concept—painting—as its *raison d'être*. In a Romantic fashion, each work of art that is being produced seems to proceed beyond its earlier phenomena and

principles. Expanded painting concerns painting as a practice that is increasingly difficult to define.

Installation art, in turn, seems to be likened to the notion of excess itself: it fuses all kinds of art forms and media, and does not fit into any previous category. Installations are usually three-dimensional and have an influence on our perception of space, and works belonging to this genre are sometimes site-specific, while sometimes they are not. Because installation stretches out in space, it differs from sculpture. By directing the spectator's attention to not only the art object but also the environment in which the work is placed, installation art forms a kind of "theater," to quote Michael Fried's words.[283] By theater, he means any kind production of illusion in art. He objects to the practices of art in which means belonging to another art form, such narration, drama, or temporal processes would be included in an art form to which they do not traditionally belong, such as painting or sculpture. Installation art is one of the dominant forms of contemporary art, and its basis is the heterogeneity of its elements, which may be images, other objects, architectural elements, moving image, sound and text. Therefore, varieties of installation art find conceptually their counterpart in Derrida's theories. Among them, Gérard Titus-Carmel's *Tlingit Coffins* may be closest to installation art, as they form a series of works installed in space and contain variation of a similar theme. It is worth considering whether seriality is a factor that may potentially *make* works of art into an installation if they are installed in space to form one.

The deconstructionist view contributes finally to an understanding of art that I am prepared to call a politics of installation. In theories of deconstruction and Derrida in specific, art does not exist merely "for art's sake," nor does it exist "for the senses" alone, from the will to produce or enjoy sensuous pleasure. Derrida's, like Jean-Luc Nancy's, thinking of art rather originates from the idea that no coherent, unified concept of art exists: no concept that would, as such, enclose all past, present, and future art. For them, the subject, phenomena, and philosophies of art are too varied to be encompassed by any general concept, nor is there only a single producer, origin, or method for art. Instead, art results from a configuration of a multiplicity of contexts.[284] The art of collage, with overlapping techniques and materials, both visual images, text, and ready-made objects, may be closer to providing a "model" for works of art. Nor can a unified apparatus of interpretation be discovered for one "art," but rather, its instances—works of art—exist in heterogeneous installations of different changing aspects. Further, works arise from a set of circumstances, such as political, social, and artistic situations, and are received in another, kind of situation that may escape the original intentions of the author radically. Therefore, the concept of the work of art can be acknowledged as a politicized: it is non-totalizable, unnameable by a single essence, which gives it a space out of the control of philosophy and all kinds of preconceptions.

Hence, the concept of the "work of art" can be understood in the sense of an installation that emerges from divergent texts and contexts.[285] Works of art reflect this situation; instead of being unified artifacts fabricated in a single medium by a single artist, they often consist of heterogeneous elements that are brought and kept together by invisible, conceptual ties. They may be the result of, for example, the influence of common discourses and relations to other works of art. In a work of art, contexts meet and join in unanticipated ways. If installation works as a paradigm for the contemporary work of art, it can be seen as something that shows, as I have referred to above, the inadequacy of many earlier methods of classification in art. Thus, installation as a model for art has also a political significance.

Claire Bishop has suggested that the type of experience in installation art differs from that of "traditional" painting and sculpture.[286] The installation structures the viewing subject in that he or she cannot keep a distance toward the work of art, but enters physically into the work to have an experience of it. The installation does not remain within the frames of a self-contained object but leads the viewer to specific locations and spaces that exist as single situations. The installation requires the viewer's immediate presence. Moreover, installations may be ephemeral: they are often dismantled and even destroyed after the exposition. As Bishop maintains, the role of installations is therefore to structure the relation to the viewer and thus to create forms of activated spectatorship: a dispersed and decentered subject instead of modern, unified, and self-reflexive subjectivity.[287] Installation art creates a sense of disorientation and displacement, and thus it "fragments" the viewer by detaching him or her from rationality. It can be said, then, that the political agency implied by installation art is that it both decenters *and* activates the viewer.

In Bishop's view, the theory of the installation dismantles the Cartesian subject, which makes the aims of installation political. Derrida does not deal with the subject as explicitly, but as an art form, the idea of installation corresponds to his view in that it is a composite consisting of incongruous parts unlike, for example, a modernist work of art that is unified. Derrida's theory of the work of art produces a self-forming "model" for the late modernist work that remains without any model; it can be described as a composition of variable, often controversial components, in a way that it constantly experiments with and extends the previous categories of art.

NOTES

1. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind* (*Mémoires d'aveugle*).
2. Nancy, *Le Plaisir au dessin*, 86.

3. Beverly Schreiber Jacoby, "Drawing," in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 9, ed. Jane Turner (New York: Grove, 1996), 212–213.

4. For example, Luis Camnitzer, "Printmaking: A Colony of the Arts," in *The Graphic Unconscious* (Philadelphia: Philagrafika, 2011), 104.

5. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 2–3 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 10–11).

6. Ginette Michaud, "Derrida, à l'improviste," in Jacques Derrida, *À dessein, le dessin* (Le Havre: Franciscopolis Éditions, 2013), 54.

7. See, for example, Joanna Hodge, "On Time, and Temporisation; On temporalisation and history," in *Jacques Derrida: Key Concepts*, ed. Claire Colebrook (London & New York: Routledge, 2015), 106.

8. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 11 (*De la grammatologie*, 22–23).

9. Cf. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 70–71 (*De la grammatologie*, 103–104).

10. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 67 (*De la grammatologie*, 98).

11. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 63; *Chemins qui ne mènent nulle part*, 71.

12. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 43–50.

13. Michael Inwood, *Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), 122.

14. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 44 ("Werksein heisst: eine Welt aufstellen," Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1980), 30.

15. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 11 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 16: "Un trait n'apparaît jamais, jamais lui-même, jamais une première fois. Il commence par se retirer.")

16. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 11 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 16). Cf. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 231.

17. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 12 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 17).

18. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 63.

19. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 63, 83.

20. See, for example, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 5–6, 36–49; Martin Heidegger, *On* Time and Being, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 3; cf. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 39, 46 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 43, 51).

21. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 232. Michaud remarks here that the thought of the *forma formans* is shared by Derrida and Nancy. See Jean-Luc Nancy's *Trop* (Montréal: UQAM, 2006), *Le plaisir au dessin* (2009). Both Derrida and Nancy share an interest towards the art of Jean-Michel Atlan; see Derrida, "De la couleur à la lettre," in *Penser à ne pas voir* and Nancy, *Atlan—Les Détrempes* (Paris: Hazan, 2010). Both philosophers have also written extensively on the artist Simon Hantaï, especially Nancy in *La Connaissance des textes* (Paris: Galilée, 2001) and *Jamais de mot créateur . . . (Correspondance 2000–2008)* (Paris: Galilée, 2013).

22. It could be said that, in addition to having a function that is similar to *différance*, the *trait* has a close affinity with Derrida's notions of *khôra* and spatiality or *espacement*. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 144 ("À dessein, le dessin").

23. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 45 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 48–50).

24. Cf. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 45–46, cf. 49–51 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 50, cf. 54).

25. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 115–116 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 169–170); also Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

26. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 142 ("À dessein, le dessin").

27. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 141–142.

28. See also Houillon, "Derrida et l'intraitable *épochè* de l'œuvre d'art," 294.

29. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 181–182, note 8 (*La dissémination*, 207–208, note 7).

30. Joana Masó et al., "'Echo-graphic Images': Writing or Piercing the Visible," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 40, no. 2 (June 2007): 216.

31. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 108 (*De la grammatologie*, 159); *Memoirs of the Blind*, 2 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 10).

32. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 56 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 60).

33. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 4 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 11).

34. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 4 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 11)

35. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 294–295 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 429–430).

36. See Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 11 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 16).

37. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 54 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 59).

38. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 12 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 17).

39. Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies*, 147.

40. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 250 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 367).

41. Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (1987), trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 107–108.

42. This notion appears, for example, in Derrida's discussion of the ideal of beauty in Kant and in Gérard Titus-Carmel's works of art. See *The Truth in Painting*, 108–118, 218 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 123–135, 250).

43. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 232.

44. Cf. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 75–76 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 87–89).

45. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 211–212 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 313–314).

46. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 55 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 59–60).

47. See Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 44–45 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 48–50).

48. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 68–69 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 69, 72).

49. The rhythm does not appear in itself, but allows things to appear, simultaneously dividing and sharing out things. Through the rhythm, the limit of a thing itself presents itself. Jacques Derrida, "Introduction: Desistance," in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 31ff. On the theme of the syncopating rhythm of being, also Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Sublime Offering," in *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, ed. Jean-François Courtine and Jean-Luc Nancy, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 42 ("L'offrande sublime," in Jean-François Courtine and Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., *Du sublime*, Paris: Belin, 1988, 60–61).

50. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" (1960), in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1994), 142.

51. Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 143; Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), 229, cit. Merleau-Ponty (Bergson, *La Pensée et le mouvant*, 1934, 264–265).

52. Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 143.

53. Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 144.

54. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*.

55. Lyotard, *Que peindre? / What to Paint?*, 189.

56. Lyotard, *Que peindre? / What to Paint?*, 193.

57. Cf. Escoubas, "Derrida et la vérité du dessin," 59.

58. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 9 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 14).

59. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, esp. 11–13 (*La Vérité en peinture*, esp. 16–18).

60. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 69–71 (*De la grammatologie*, 102–103).

61. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 53–54 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 58).

62. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, esp. 11–13 (*La Vérité en peinture*, esp. 16–18).

63. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 55 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 59).

64. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 294–295 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 429–430).

65. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 51–53 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 54–57).

66. However, what we see in a drawing includes the edge of the contour that passes between the inside and the outside of the *trait*. This interval is a distance; it is the difference that creates space for all manifestations, a zoned and internally unlimited, multiplying limit, a state or phase of perpetual beginning. It can also be stated that the *trait* is the endless separation of the outer edge of that limit from the limit's own surface, which thus results in the motion of the unlimited. Such movement creates a limit that is divided infinitely from the inside: it is a space for things to begin anew repeatedly. It is possible to see here an affinity with the question of limiting the limitless as it appears in Jean-Luc Nancy's analysis of the Kantian sublime. Cf. Nancy, "The Sublime Offering," 39 ("L'offrande sublime," 56–57).

67. In this context, it is possible to compare Derrida's thinking of the heterogeneity of the *traits* to the heterogeneity of the senses that characterizes the work of art for Jean-Luc Nancy. His claim is that all works of art evoke different sensorial registers, even though these registers do not fuse into one another. Between the sensorial registers, there is a heterogeneous touching, by which art dislocates the lived unity of the sensuous. Art breaks the "lived unity" of sense and produces instead a "pictorial" or "sonorous" unity, for example. As a result, the registers become endlessly differentiated, thus creating a plurality of different worlds that art presents. Nancy, *The Muses*, 21–27 (*Les Muses*, 42–51). On the dispersion of senses, see also Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 99–100 (*L'écriture de la différence*, 146–147).

68. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 45 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 50).

69. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 57 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 61). Apart from appealing to eyesight, painting evokes other senses. Derrida mentions the "cry" (*le cri*) in the painting: "the resonance of silence, a 'keeping quiet' that nothing could translate," in *Penser à ne pas voir*, 18–19: "la résonance du silence, un 'se-taire' qui rien ne saurait traduire" ("De la couleur à la lettre"). See also Ginette Michaud, "Ombres portées: quelques remarques autour des *skiagraphies* de Jacques Derrida," in *Derrida et la question de l'art*, ed. Adnen Jdey (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2011), 331, and Joana Masó, "Illustrer, photographier: Le point de suspension ou l'image chez Jacques Derrida," in *Derrida et la question de l'art*, 361. Masó refers especially to Derrida's sentence in *Memoirs of the Blind*: "For it is not the withdrawal of the line—that which draws the line back, draws it again, at the very moment when the *trait* is drawn, when it draws away—that which grants speech? And at the same time forbids separating drawing from the discursive murmur whose trembling transfixes it?" *Memoirs of the Blind*, 56 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 60). As Masó suggests, "the strange trait that withdraws from language" is probably what forbids us to detach the drawing from the movement of writing.

70. French theater theorist Denis Guénoun has suggested that in the actor's body on stage, the body becomes word and, respectively, the word is embodied. Only in this encounter may the signifying, linguistic body and bodily sign emerge. This event of language differs from discursive language. For Guénoun's deconstructive interpretation of the stage, see his *Actions et acteurs: Raisons du drame sur scène* (Paris: Belin, 2005).

71. Julian Wolfreys, "Art," in *Understanding Derrida*, eds. Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 87.

72. Crowell, "Phenomenology and Aesthetics," 37–38.

73. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 142 ("À dessein, le dessin"); Michaud, "Derrida, à l'improviste," 54–56.

74. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 57 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 61).

75. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 236; Houillon, "Derrida et l'intraitable *époché* de l'œuvre d'art," 294–295; Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 143–144 ("À dessein, le dessin").

76. Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of drawing is at many points closely linked with that of Derrida's. Nancy approaches drawing primarily from the viewpoint of form. What Nancy wants to point out more emphatically than Derrida is that drawing *is* form itself. However, Nancy's concept of form is not an already given idea that a drawing would make a copy of, but rather the birth of a form or of an idea. It may include something that resembles an *eidos*: an idea that guides the making of the work but that is only effectuated in the work as if for the first time in the specific form it takes there.

77. See Diarmuid Costello, "What's So New about the 'New' Theory of Photography?," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (JAAC) 75, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 439–452.

78. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged Edition (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1979), 20, 23; also André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 9–16, cit. Costello, "What's So New about the 'New' Theory of Photography?," 439.

79. See Michaud, "Ombres portées."

80. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 10.

81. Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 5.

82. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), 118. Italics in the original.

83. Jacques Derrida, *Prégnances: Lavis de Colette Deblé, Peintures* (Mont de Marsan: L'Atelier des Brisants, 2004), 18–19.

84. Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes*, 25. See also Jacques Derrida, *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 67 ("Les morts de Roland Barthes").

85. Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 1.

86. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 208e7–10; *Parmenides*, 165c–d.

87. Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 15. Here, as in *Memoirs of the Blind*, Derrida refers to the legend of Dibutade.

88. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 322. See also Derrida, *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, 63.

89. Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes*, 58; Michaud, "Ombres portées," 325, note 28. For the topic of light and darkness, see Michaud, "Ombres portées," 326–327. Michaud refers to the photograph as "the language of light in shadow" and "signature of the shadow," or its enigma.

90. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 261 ("*Aletheia*").

91. Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 44 (*Mal d'archive*, Paris: Galilée, 1995, 107); Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 2–3.

92. Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 2.

93. Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 3.

94. Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 4–5.

95. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 266 ("*Aletheia*").

96. François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, bilingual edition, trans. Robin Mackay (New York: Sequence, 2012).

97. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 328; Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes*, 42–43.

98. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 65–66 ("Annali"), cit. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 321.

99. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, II, 7.

100. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 321, 336; see also Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 64 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 68).

101. In "A Lecture on *Right of Inspection*," Derrida writes of the photo-novel of Marie-Françoise Plissart, a Belgian photographer and filmmaker. In *Demeure, Athènes* (translated in English as *Athens, Remains*, 2009) he discusses photographs taken by Jean-François Bonhomme in Greece. Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes*, 19, 25, 31, 40; "Right of Inspection," 24 ("Une lecture de *Droit de regards*," iii).

102. Derrida, "Copy, Archive, Signature," 27, 29.

103. Derrida, "Copy, Archive, Signature," 35.

104. Derrida, "Right of Inspection," 24–25 ("Une lecture de *Droit de regards*," iii).

105. Derrida, "Right of Inspection," 24 ("Une lecture de *Droit de regards*," ii).

106. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 266 ("*Aletheia*").

107. Derrida, "Copy, Archive, Signature," 8.

108. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 79 (orig. *La Chambre claire*, 1980).

109. Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 254–263, esp. 256–260; for comparison between Barthes, Blanchot and Derrida, see Laurent Milesi, "Between Barthes, Blanchot, and Mallarmé: Skia(Photo)-Graphies of Derrida," in *The French Connections of Jacques Derrida*, eds. John Brannigan, Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 192.

110. Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 44 ("Rhetoric of the Image," 1964).

111. See Milesi, "Between Barthes, Blanchot, and Mallarmé," 192–193; Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 135 (*Spectres de Marx*, Paris: Galilée, 1993, 215). The connection of sign and death is reflected also by Derrida in *Speech and Phenomena*, 54: "*I am* originally means *I am mortal*." Blanchot's idea of literature and writing as a "tomb" comes close to this thinking, see, for example, Maurice Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death" (1948), trans. Lydia Davis, in Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), 300–344 (orig. *La Part du feu*, 1949). Cf. chapter 7 of this study.

112. Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, 24–25 (Derrida, "Artifactualities").

113. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 319; Jacques Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes* (Paris: Galilée, 2009), 50.

114. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6–7.

115. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 332.

116. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 332; Derrida, *Prégnances*, 13.

117. This notion was articulated by Friedrich Schlegel in the "*Athenaeum* Fragments," published in 1798. Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 18–93.

118. Derrida, "Copy, Archive, Signature," 43.

119. Derrida, "Copy, Archive, Signature," 8–9.

120. Derrida, "Copy, Archive, Signature," 13.

121. Derrida, "Right of Inspection," 91 ("Une lecture de *Droit de regards*," xlvii). Cf. Maurice Blanchot, *L'écriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 117.

122. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 338.

123. Derrida, "Right of Inspection," 90 ("Une lecture de *Droit de regards*," xlvi); cf. "Copy, Archive, Signature," 44; *Penser à ne pas voir*, 262 ("*Aletheia*"); Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76: "la chose a été là." For further discussion on this matter, see Nicholas Royle, *After Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995), 5–6, and Michaud, "Ombres portées," 323.

124. Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 44 ("Rhetoric of the Image," 1964).

125. Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, 151.

126. Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 141–148 ("The Reality Effect," orig. "L'effet du réel," 1968).

127. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction* (1962), trans. John P. Leavey Jr. (Stony Brook: Nicholas Hays, 1978), 57–58. Cit. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009), 42.

128. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 11 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 16).

129. Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes*, 30. The question is also about memory: in "Right of Inspection," Derrida refers to psychoanalysis—Freud's "mystic writing pad" that showed that in order for the trace to be preserved, it must be renewed. Cf. Derrida, "Copy, Archive, Signature," 11.

130. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 53.

131. Derrida, "Right of Inspection," 34 ("Une lecture de *Droit de regards*," xviii).

132. Derrida, "Copy, Archive, Signature," 39.

133. Derrida, "Right of Inspection," 90–91 ("Une lecture de *Droit de regards*," xlvi–xlvii); see Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, esp. 113–134. For Derrida, the photographic referent is divided in itself, whereas Barthes and Stiegler rather argue for the presence of the referent. Cf. Garry Sherbert, "Ghost Dance: Derrida, Stiegler, and Film as Phantomachia," *Mosaic* 48, no. 4 (December 2015): 105–121.

134. Royle, *After Derrida*, 6–7.

135. Derrida, "Copy, Archive, Signature," 39; *Penser à ne pas voir*, 302 ("Videor").

136. Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, 149.

137. Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes*, 14. Cit. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 318.

138. Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, 152. However, in Barthes's account the absent signifier now becomes the signifier of reality, in opposition to what Derrida thinks. Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, 148.

139. "On croit sans croire, mais croire sans croire reste un croire." Jacques Derrida, "Entretien: Le cinéma et ses fantômes," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 556 (avril 2001): 78. Cit. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 341.

140. For a vivid discussion on Derrida's "hauntology" in photography and film, and the idea of image as apparition, see Kas Saghafi, *Apparitions—Of Derrida's Other* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010), esp. 59–82.

141. Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, 119.

142. Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, 119–120.

143. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 73.

144. Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, eds. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 43.

145. Derrida, "Right of Inspection," 24–25 ("Une lecture de *Droit de regards*," ii–iii).

146. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 69–71.

147. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 70.

148. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 71.

149. See Stiegler and Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, 153–154.

150. Jacques Derrida and Safaa Fathy, *Tourner les mots: au bord d'un film* (Paris: Galilée, 2000), 92–93. Cit. Ginette Michaud, *Veilleuses: autour de trois images de Jacques Derrida* (Montréal: Nota Bene, 2009), 90.

151. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 42 (*La Chambre claire*, 72).

152. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26 (*La Chambre claire*, 48–49).

153. Michaud, *Veilleuses*, 90.

154. Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971).

155. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 263: "Pourquoi semble-t-elle [la clarté de la nuit] non seulement sortir et procéder de la nuit, comme si le noir donnait naissance au blanc, mais appartenir encore à l'ombre, rester cependant au cœur du sombre abîme dont elle émane?" ("*Aletheia*").

156. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 263.

157. *The Holy Bible*, Matthew 26:26. Cf. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 369 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 422). In Jean-Luc Nancy's book *Corpus*, this sentence and the conception of Christian incarnation are in focus, as well as their implications to Western philosophy.

158. Meyer Schapiro, "The Still Life as a Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh" (1968), in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Donald Preziosi (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 298. Schapiro refers here to Heidegger's *Origin of the Work Art*, 35–36.

159. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 366 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 418).

160. See Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 377–381 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 431–435).

161. Michaud, "Ombres portées."

162. Plato, *Republic*, 517b–518a, cit. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 15 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 21–22).

163. Cf. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 240–241.

164. See Merleau-Ponty, "The Eye and the Mind" and *The Visible and the Invisible*.

165. Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent," 304.

166. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 5–8 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 9–12).

167. See Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 223, 235 ("De la couleur à la lettre"); Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 259.

168. For the "death" of painting, see, for example, Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting," *October* 16 (Spring 1981).

169. See, for example, Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," and Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), esp. 148–172 ("Art and Objecthood," 1967).

170. Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, eds. Sandra Buckley, Michael Hardt and Brian Massumi, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 49–60 ("Notes on Gesture," 1992).

171. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 163 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 185–187).

172. Cf. Hegel, *Aesthetics I*, 10–11. As many commentators have remarked, there is, however, hardly any consensus about the scope of the Hegelian "end of art." For a detailed analysis of Hegel and the end of art, see Eva Geulen, *The End of Art*; also Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Le poids d'une pensée*, esp. 33–63, and *The Muses*, 81–100 (*Les Muses*, 133–159). For Kant, art still "serves" moral ends, whereas for Hegel art is free from such teleology. See Nancy, *The Muses*, 34–35 (*Les Muses*, 62–63).

173. Hegel, *Aesthetics I*, 103.

174. Hegel, *Aesthetics I*, 605.

175. Geulen, *The End of Art*, 2.

176. Accordingly, Hegel's thesis on the end of art has been actualized in various ways, which have been characterized as "pathetic, melancholy, reactionary and revolutionary, philosophical and aesthetic." See Geulen, *The End of Art*, 2. In Geulen's opinion, the figure of the "end of art" has become dominant, to the extent that whatever art has been until the present is inconceivable without talk of the end of art. This would be true although the "death" of art as such does not appear in Hegel: he writes that something is "past," "lost," "over"; that art has transcended itself (*Aesthetics I*, 607); that there is a completion to art and that it has a "final end" (ibid., 55).

177. Geulen, *The End of Art*, 12. What is even more, Eva Geulen claims, Hegel has founded "a myth of art, a privileged self-description of the art system." Geulen, *The End of Art*, 2.

178. Ernest Renan, *Dialogues et fragments philosophiques* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1876), 83. *Cit*. Nancy, *The Muses*, 86, note 6.

179. For Geulen, the emphasis on the end has led to an "obsessive recourse to an ever new end of art," in which the figure of the "end" itself has encountered exhaustion, banalization and trivialization. The crisis discourse of modernity is itself threatened with crisis as it has turned into a cliché: "from Hegel's speculation to platitude." Geulen, *The End of Art*, 3.

180. See, for example, Petersen, "Introduction," 9–21; Graw and Burcharth (eds.), *Painting beyond Itself*.

181. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 5.

182. Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, 301ff.

183. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 202 ("Le dessin par quatre chemins").

184. Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Washington: Bay Press, 1983), ix–xvi; James Meyer and Toni Ross, "Aesthetic/Anti-Aesthetic: An Introduction," *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 20–23.

185. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, esp. 70–74 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 81–85).

186. See also Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 222.

187. Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," xv.

188. Nancy, "Éloquentes rayures," 17: "Non, il ne parlera pas de ou sur l'art, et non, il ne le fera pas parler." See also Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 217; Houillon, "Derrida et l'intraitable *épochè* de l'œuvre d'art," 281.

189. See Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 220; Nancy, *The Muses*, 11 (*Les Muses*, 27); Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 14–15 (*Être singulier pluriel*, 32); Houillon, "Derrida et l'intraitable *épochè* de l'œuvre d'art," 286.

190. Van Sevenant, "Le disjoint fait œuvre," 75.

191. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 167 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 192).

192. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 57 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 61); *The Truth in Painting*, 156–157 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 178–180).

193. Van Sevenant, "Le disjoint fait œuvre," 79–81.

194. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 171 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 196).

195. Van Sevenant, "Le disjoint fait œuvre," 82. Cf. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 16, 31 (*Spectres de Marx*, 39, 60).

196. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 231–232 ("De la couleur à la lettre"): "D'ailleurs, comment le décrire? Qu'on me permette de faire ici l'économie d'une longue dissertation théorique, mais ironique, sur la description d'un tableau. Quand je pense que certains osent ou prétendent faire ça, décrire, esquisser la moindre description d'un tableau! Il est toujours impossible, il devrait être interdit de décrire un tableau, de le 'constater,' autrement qu'en ordonnant: allez écouter ce tableau qui n'est plus un tableau, qui n'a plus la stabilité apaisée d'un tableau, entendez son incantation, sa prière, ses injonctions ou ses commandements (tel tableau impérieux ressemble parfois à un table de commendements), vibrez à la vibration de son cri, et puis allez voir, si vous pouvez, ces lignes, ces traits, ces bandes, ces nœuds, ces pas de danse. Ils enlèvent et soulèvent, ils font lever les couleurs pour passer les mots en les tournant, ils sont faits pour se passer des mots en les tournant, ils sont faits pour se passer des mots que cependant ils appellent."

197. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 249–250: "Ce qui commande et est mis à l'œuvre dans l'œuvre d'art."

198. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 302 ("Videor").

199. Cf. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 249.

200. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 6 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 10).

201. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 201 ("Le dessin par quatre chemins").

202. John Hollander, "Ecphrasis," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 2, ed. Michael Kelly (New York & Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 86–89.

203. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 157 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 178): "*Ich*, corps arraché d'un poisson, corps étranger d'un mot pour intéresser une *autre langue* (Adami le fait souvent) au jeu des signatures et à la surenchère agonistique spéculant sur le *je*. Corps tronqué ou matrice surchargée (il y en a tant chez Adami), amorce pour le phallus christique (*Ichtus*), piste, graphe, ou trace (*Ichnos*) d'un mors sans voix."

204. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 201–202 ("Le dessin par quatre chemins").

205. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 72.

206. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 211–229.

207. Cf. *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 42–43.

208. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 78; cf. Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent," 300.

209. Nancy, "Éloquentes rayures," 17.

210. See Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 214–215.

211. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 142–143 ("À dessein, le dessin").

212. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 214: "Restance et revenance spectrale: ouvrir la possibilité d'un discours autre sur la peinture (ou, plus largement, de l'art) et tenir que la notion même de 'phénomène' se révèle impuissante à le cerner—à le contenir."

213. Cf. Rabaté, "Joyce, Husserl, Derrida ou comment œuvrer à l'infini," 68.

214. Jacques Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* (Paris: Galilée, 2000), 257 (*On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005, 229). Italics in the original. See also Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, 63 (*Le Sens du monde*, 104).

215. Antonioli, "À la limite, le toucher," 454.

216. Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 258 (*On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, 229–230). See also Houillon, "Derrida et l'intraitable *épochè* de l'œuvre d'art," 289.

217. Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 47 (*On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, 34).

218. Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent," 300.

219. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 25–28. The idea of art as reproduction and likeness is grounded in the distinction between matter (*hyle*) and form (*morphe*) in Plato's philosophy. The distinction of form and matter is, to Heidegger, "*the conceptual schema which is used, in the greatest variety of ways, quite generally for all art theory and aesthetics*." Ibid., 26–27. Italics in the original.

220. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 32. In effect, the peasant shoes do not *present* anything, but they are rather a visual realization of an equipment that opens a sphere of life by showing the equipmental quality of equipment, its truth as reliability. However, Heidegger does not explain directly what the painting's particular means are in showing reliability.

221. Potestà, "Derrida et la question de l'art," 303.

222. Potestà, "Derrida et la question de l'art," 303.

223. Potestà, "Derrida et la question de l'art," 303.

224. Cf. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 250–258; Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 230, 241; Nancy, "Éloquentes rayures," 15–16.

225. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 252.

226. Gaillot, "Théorie esthétique et critique deconstructive," 80.

227. Nancy, "Éloquentes rayures," 17.

228. Nancy, "Éloquentes rayures," 19; Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 39.

229. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 215.

230. See also Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 255, 258ff.

231. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 76 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 88); also *Memoirs of the Blind* and *Penser à ne pas voir*, 217–241 ("De la couleur à la lettre").

232. Gaillot, "Théorie esthétique et critique déconstructive," 79–81.

233. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 223: "les choses se compliquent, elles s'épaississent, s'assombrissent, elles se noircissent même parfois."

234. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried Herder, *On the Origin of Languages*, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1966), ch. XIII, 53. Cit. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 206 (*De la grammatologie*, 294).

235. See Owens, "Detachment from the *Parergon*," esp. 43–45.

236. Cf. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 67.

237. Owens, "Detachment from the *Parergon*," 43.

238. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 17ff. (*La Vérité en peinture*, 21ff).

239. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 233.

240. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 172 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 196).

241. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 172 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 196–197).

242. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 233 ("De la couleur à la lettre").

243. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 236 ("De la couleur à la lettre").

244. Wassily Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, in Kandinsky, *Complete writings on Art 1*, eds. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982), 162. Cit. de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, 157.

245. Cf. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1980), esp. 221–222.

246. "Languages don't all have the same number of terms for colors—scientists have a new theory why," *The Conversation*, accessed January 29, 2021, http://theconversation.com/languages-dont-all-have-the-same-number-of-terms-for-colors-scientists-have-a-new-theory-why-84117.

247. Houillon, "Derrida et l'intraitable *épochè* de l'œuvre d'art," 295.

248. Cf. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 80–81 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 93–94); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 43–138 ("Typography"). Recently, David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan have used the term "fictioning" to characterize current experimental practices of art and to map their modes of existence from the perspective of creating alternative fictions to what the authors consider to be dominant ones. David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan, *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2019).

249. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 44–45 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 48).

250. See Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 255–256; Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 145–146 ("À dessein, le dessin"); Derrida, *Prégnances*, 17.

251. See Van Sevenant, "Le disjoint fait œuvre."

252. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 53 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 58). Italics in the original.

253. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 55 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 59); *Penser à ne pas voir*, 139 ("Le dessein du philosophe").

254. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 55 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 59); also *Penser à ne pas voir*, 143 ("Le dessein du philosophe").

255. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 233–238, esp. 237.

256. Like painting, also the *parerga*—the contexts of painting—are not purely ideal but have a necessary thickness for Derrida. The *parerga* are not only separated from the *ergon*, but also from the outside—for instance, from the wall behind the painting, from the space of a statue, and from all their historical, economic, and political milieu. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 61 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 71).

257. A similar irreducibility is even more manifest in varieties of art that are beyond the scope of Derrida's discussion, such as sculpture and installation art that are often composed of a complexity of material elements.

258. Masó et al., "'Echo-graphic Images'," 214.

259. Derrida, *Prégnances*, 9.

260. Derrida, *Prégnances*, 12.

261. See *The Holy Bible*, The Book of Daniel, ch. 13. The depictions of the theme of Susanna and the Elders include paintings by Rubens, Tintoretto, Rembrandt, Lorenzo Lotto, and Artemisia Gentileschi, among others.

262. Derrida, *Prégnances*, 17, cf. 11.

263. Derrida, *Prégnances*, esp. 8–10.

264. Derrida, *Prégnances*, 13.

265. Derrida, *Prégnances*, 21.

266. Derrida, *Prégnances*, 18–19.

267. Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 257–258 (*On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, 229–230).

268. Alain Badiou has introduced the term "inaesthetics" (*inesthétique*). With it, he refers to philosophy's relation to art with the aim to maintain art as the producer of truths and to avoid making art only an object of philosophy. The purpose of Badiou's "inaesthetics" is thus to function against the aesthetic speculation. Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005), 1–2 (orig. *Petit manuel d'inesthétique*, 1998).

269. See Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 223 ("De la couleur à la lettre"); Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 258, 222; Houillon, "Derrida et l'intraitable *épochè* de l'œuvre d'art," 289.

270. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 243 ("Le 'dessous' de la peinture, de l'écriture et du dessin: support, substance, sujet, suppôt et supplice").

271. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 243.

272. In Nancy, art is "technique of the detail." Art as technique of difference and discreteness "multiplies itself into an infinity of points, in an infinitely divisible locality," so that "in each local value it combines heterogeneous values without homogenizing them." Nancy, *The Muses*, 20–21 (*Les Muses*, 42).

273. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 247–248 ("Le 'dessous' de la peinture").

274. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 22 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 26).

275. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 248 ("Le 'dessous' de la peinture").

276. "[I]l y va peut-être du trait ou de la lettre, de ce qui *noue* le trait *à la lettre* de couleur, à la lettre *de la couleur*." Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 223 ("De la couleur à la lettre").

277. Cf. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 248; see also Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 230.

278. Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 151. Nancy's point of reference here are François Martin's *Air Show* paintings (1978–1979).

279. Among influential essays against medium-specificity are, for example, W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), esp. 11–15, and Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

280. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 12.

281. Gaillot, "Théorie esthétique et critique déconstructive," 80.

282. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 255, 258ff.

283. Fried, *Art and Objecthood*.

284. The contemporary contexts of art are proliferating; among them are those such as philosophy, ways of making art (e.g., collaboration), education, science, criticism, museums, galleries and curatorial practices, discourses in society and politics, economy, other arts, the surrounding culture at large.

285. Here, it is possible to refer to Jacques Derrida's famous—and at times misunderstood—thesis, "there is nothing outside the text" (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*). Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158 (*De la grammatologie*, 227).

286. Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 10, 102ff.

287. Bishop, *Installation Art*, 128–131. For Bishop, the fragmented subject can be encountered in theories that model the subject according to unconscious representations (Sigmund Freud), the intertwining of subject and object (Merleau-Ponty), or non-coincidence and alienation from itself (Jacques Lacan, Barthes, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe).

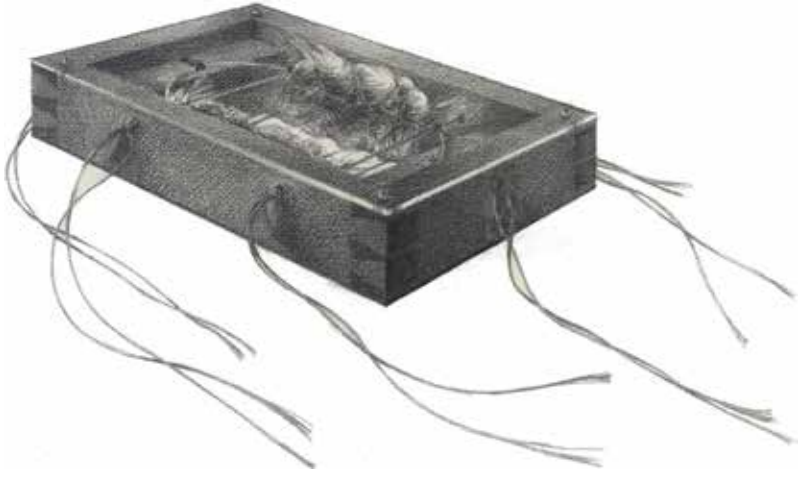


Figure 5.1 Gérard Titus-Carmel: *The Pocket Size Tlingit Coffin*, March 16, 1976, graphite pencil on paper, Paris, Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne. © ADAGP, Paris. Site: Paris, Centre Pompidou—Musée national d'art moderne—Centre de création industrielle. Photograph © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Distributed by RMN-Grand Palais/Philippe Migeat.

Chapter 5

Words and Art

Exemplarity of the Work

For Derrida, the concept of the "work of art" appears as overly general and ideal to be a sufficient description of any thing. However, referring to the analyses he has written of art, one may ask what these analyses are accounts of, and further, do they furnish examples of the without-essence, the "nothing." This question entails an inquiry into the differences and intervals between various artistic presentations and into the ideas of iteration and the constitutive blindness in art.[1] An analogous question would be whether seeing the Platonic Idea is possible.[2] An idea cannot be seen, but it can only be understood, since it is only the invisible condition of the seen.

The notion that works of art exist fundamentally without essence necessitates an overview of their position in Derrida's readings, especially in the essays of *The Truth in Painting*: "+R (Into the Bargain)," "Cartouches," and "Restitutions." Observing them, the question arises if, and how, it is possible to give examples of something that one cannot finally make a representation of, either visual or conceptual. Maybe for this reason Derrida approaches works of art in terms of *restance* or remainder: in their irreducible singularity, are the works rather examples of themselves, of their own existence as works? As Derrida and Nancy have proposed, works of art would be untranslatable in the same way as a signature or a proper name: a signature tells a truth of nothing but its own functioning.

The problem of exemplifying is organically associated with language's ability to coincide with a thing. Derrida finds the entire idea of "literal meaning" suspect. The sign or the mark may be repeated and identified in innumerable ways: he argues that it is implicit in every code and makes it into a network that is "communicable, transmittable, decipherable, iterable for a third, and hence for every possible user in general."[3] Repeatability of the sign causes writing to be detachable from subjective notions, such as

consciousness and intended meaning. Derrida's notion of art that instantiates what he calls "writing" can be thus compared with what Roland Barthes says in the essay "The Third Meaning," in which he discusses still images in Sergei Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible*. For Barthes, the still is not a sample or an idea that supposes a sort of homogeneous, statistical nature of the film elements but a quotation that is at once parodic and disseminatory.[4]

On the assumption that there is no essence common to all art, Derrida states, there cannot be any model for the production of aesthetic judgments either.[5] In this, he follows Kant's notion of the rule of taste, which is not grounded in any concept. Accordingly, the logic of the production of aesthetic judgments is not conceptual: the exemplary cannot be imitated, for taste is not acquired by imitation. For Derrida, the model or the Kantian "highest pattern" (*das höchste Muster*) for making judgments can only be an *idea* of reason, which everyone must produce in him- or herself and according to which one must judge everything that is an object of taste. Thus, there must be a pattern or a paradigm, but without imitation; this is the autoproductive logic of the exemplary, and, at the same time, of singularity.

Following the logic of exemplarity, it is possible to see a degree of similarity with Derrida's notion of mimesis.[6] The mimetic production of being implies that, by means of repetition, things come into being in innumerable forms. As Derrida claims, since repetition produces difference, the production of the same proves impossible.[7] Instead, the production of analogy turns out to be possible: analogism saturates the *hiatus* between the model and the thing produced by repetition. What is left of repetition is the *mise en abyme*, which resists the abyss of collapse and reconstitutes the economy of mimesis. The act of repetition thereby brings about an economy of mimesis—in Derrida's terms, "economimesis," or the law of the same and of the proper that always re-forms itself: "Against imitation but by analogy."[8] Hence, exemplarity never involves the reproduction of the same, but rather difference or, at most, similarity.

Based on the alleged singularity of works of art, the question remains: what are works of art examples of, if they are examples of anything? One possible answer is that all works are finally nothing but examples of their own singular existence, or of the fact that, as works of art, they are unique and therefore untranslatable events: instances of painting and drawing, or other kinds of art. However, for Derrida the untranslatability is never absolute between one language and another; it is absolute only between language and nonlanguage, of which works of art serve as examples.[9] In this sense, the painting is equal to poetry, as it is impossible to convert any of these into a system or discursive language—of philosophy, for instance. According to Derrida, it is no more possible to define what the work of art "is" as it is possible to transport the proper meaning of a signature or a color, for example, by replacing it with

another signature or color. Therefore, as the idea of translation is to produce univocal transparency between two or more texts, untranslatability is essential to the work of art in a way that is similar to signature.[10] To speak of the untranslatability between language and nonlanguage means tracing a relation without relation. This singular relation ties together the two sides, which, in their separation, seem to become undetachable and inseparable.[11] Derrida's figure for such relation is "illustration" that is concretized by François Loubrieu's pen drawings made for Derrida's book *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, written on the occasion of an exhibition by Loubrieu at the Centre Pompidou in fall 1979.[12] In illustrations, the dissociable elements—the trace of a drawing and the trace of a word or writing—become one: they form a relation that is syncopated in an event. As Joana Masó has described it, the tremor of the line and the color that is inseparable from the sonic signifier are undetachable from the figure of writing that is the Derridean trace.[13] As such, they are both graphic events, and they both leave a trace.

In a wider context of theories of deconstruction, every object must appear as an occasion for a reinvention of deconstruction: every object is different(ly).[14] The attempt to create a general theory of art and of the work of art thus seems a difficult, even impossible task. As Andrew Benjamin has noted, philosophical accounts of art and works of art have often struggled with the tendency of making works of art *exemplary* cases of theories instead of making justice to their singularity and material existence.[15] How to speak of works of art and try to avoid using them as mere illustrations of thinking?[16] Yet, the discourse of art, like language in entirety, is necessarily in a relation to its material conditions and the singularity of the phenomena. One must ask of a text how it understands its relation to such conditions: how it works within the frame in which "to be" is always understood as "to be as."[17]

The first chapter of *The Truth in Painting*, "Parergon," focuses on the Kantian theory of the judgment of beauty.[18] In this large essay, Derrida takes as examples a number of works of art ranging from historical architectural drawings—cryptoporticoes designed for sixteenth-century gardens, doorframes, and ornamental panels of Renaissance and Baroque buildings—to the illustration of a scientific text from the seventeenth century, like Johannes Kepler's *De nive sexangula* (1611), to paintings, such as Lucas Cranach's *Lucretia* (1532) and Francisco Goya's *Colossus* paintings (ca 1810). These works of art are not part of Derrida's presentation for the reason that they would be analyzed as works of art or as images, but rather due to the manner in which they exemplify—or contradict—Kant's argument proposed in the *Analytic of the Beautiful* and elsewhere in the *Critique of Judgment*. They show how Kant's theory accommodates to its arguments about the limits and frames of the work of art, and at the same time, of the philosophical discourse, so that the images both serve to illustrate and contribute to the argument.

+R (INTO THE BARGAIN)

In "+R (Into the Bargain)," the second essay of *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida does not depart from a philosophical debate but from the discussion of drawings by Valerio Adami, some of them inspired by Derrida's book *Glas* (1974). Most of these *Studies for a Drawing after* Glas and other works are drawn with sharp lines and form simple, two-dimensional figures with clear-cut contours and no shading, the black coloration being left by graphite pencil on white paper. Each drawing chosen from Adami contains written words, the only exception being an oil painting in bright colors.[19] Of interest to Derrida are the margins and the possibilities of their crossing out, the frame and other kinds of lines of division, which literally appear in many of Adami's drawings, such as *Studies for a Drawing after* Glas (1974–1975), *Ritratto di Walter Benjamin* (1973), and *La meccanica dell'avventura* (1975).[20]

In Adami's drawings, geometric lines alternate with organic ones to create a rhythm of straight and curving lines. The pictorial surface is arranged in order to form varied spaces with approaching and withdrawing surfaces. The differences expressed by these graphic elements thus adds the sense of movement to the architectonics of the drawings. What characterizes Adami's paintings and drawings is the clarity and distinction of the pictorial elements: spaces and colored surfaces are defined by notable outlines that give a distinct form. The idea of constructedness of the image and the distinction that takes place in it and amount to Derrida's thinking of Adami as an artist of *différance*.

Not only are Adami's traces differential in that they form spaces, but there also is spacing taking place inside the drawn lines themselves. They differ from each other in the variation of thickness and are often composed of several parallel lines. From this perspective, the description of traces in Adami's drawings parallels with Derrida's idea that, unlike the visible thickness (*épaisseur*) of the color, the functioning of the *trait* that has no place in visibility.[21] The *trait* that founds drawing in Derrida is colorless by nature and thus inapparent. It is pure, invisible *différance* that withdraws in the eyes of the spectator and exists to fulfill the task of creating spatial differences.[22] In Adami's drawings, however, the lines are strong and distinguishable, black and solid in appearance, often accentuated to the extent that they inevitably become visible as such. In this sense, they do not disappear by merely allowing us to see without giving themselves to be seen, according to the Derrida's definition of the *trait*.[23] In Adami, painting and drawing thus come close to each other, to the point that they may be inseparable. In this, they verify Derrida's idea that the encounter of color and the *trait* creates an abyss, in which the two sides do not fuse into one another but attach them to each other in their separation.

In Adami's paintings, the drawn and painted lines are often heterogeneous: some of them are thinner, some are thicker or combined of several pen or paint strokes. One line may be many lines at a time; an individual line stroke is dependent on several other converging traces. The place of the line, or in a more abstract sense, the *trait*, depends on the context and the structure of the work. Neither the *trait* nor the line has no signification before it combines with other lines, since only then does it receive a form and opens a space with other lines and *traits*. According to Jean-François Lyotard, in Adami's works the line comes before the curvature of surfaces, and one must grasp what it is before it takes shape.[24] This is natural from the draughtsman's viewpoint, whereas in the spectator's eyes the lines and the space created by them are born together. For Lyotard, the line is anterior to "all tracing and all crime," and makes them possible.[25]

Adami's drawings are often composed of very clearly defined, strong, thick, and distinctive outlines in black pencil or paint with almost no shading. However, in many cases, his markings are not merely two-dimensional: the lines differ slightly in thickness, and by the side of his lines, Adami often adds another line. In this way, their *traits* are divided and multiply in what first seems to be a single stroke; therefore, the outlines are often spaced in themselves, and none of them is in the position of the unique line of division between spaces. The self-division of the lines works to intensify the drawings' sense of plasticity. In Adami's paintings, the color fields are equally distinct, and on their surface, there appears to be little variation in thickness, tones, or other painterly effects. In their even coloring, the paintings have a kind of industrial outlook, similar to many color field paintings in the tradition of minimalism, as it was represented by, for example, Barnett Newman and Kenneth Noland, or Donald Judd's minimalist sculpture with its unified layers of paint.

Reminiscent ideas appear in Derrida's inquiry into what he perceives as "two paintings in painting"—namely, in Adami's "fish painting" which Derrida calls *Ich* and which is one of the drawings belonging to the series *Study for a Drawing After* Glas.[26] Especially the notion of writing comes to the fore in this context: Derrida suggests that Adami is writing and deleting by drawing what he has written.[27] Adami's work appears *sous rature*, "under erasure." Writing "under erasure" has already a place in Heidegger's philosophy, in which it is a strategy for denouncing the metaphysics of presence and takes place by moving outside the categories of presence and absence. This is visible in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, where Heidegger avoids the word "Being."[28] For Derrida, words that are placed under erasure, such as Adami's words inscribed in a painting, are "inadequate yet necessary"—that is, no better word for them could be found: language is both relative and arbitrary.[29] This is one of the principal strategies of Derrida: to

devise a discourse that extracts from a certain cultural heritage those features that enable the deconstruction of that selfsame heritage.[30]

Erasure refers to the thought that writing deletes itself as each act of leaving trace, whether in writing or drawing, brings something new into the whole when something is added. This addition means that the logic of the supplement—of the surplus of being that which cannot be fitted into any system—is always involved in texts "under erasure," since they change what existed previously in them. The meaning of the text changes as its context changes: for example, if the marks on a painting or a drawing or sentences of a text are modified. Derrida's idea is that a minor change in details may have far-reaching effects, and in this, image and language are not different; in Lyotard's words, "It's as if a line were a sentence pursued by other means."[31]

Derrida's discussion about the painting that he names *Ich* and other works by Valerio Adami clarifies what Derrida states about the performative nature of the signature and, at the same time, of painting. As an iterative and replaceable supplement in a given context, each word and each sentence that is added on the painted surface takes on a heterogeneous meaning. Thus, the painting is never complete: each of its *traits* can be interpreted in a variety of ways. In the change of the context, the added word or any kind of *trait* introduces a second traversal. Such traversal is, however, neither secondary, derived, or subordinate to what Derrida calls "the master *tr*," namely, to Adami's drawing.[32] Derrida explains that the combination of letters *tr* that is present in *trait* and various other words does not imitate anything, but it has only differential value—it works both inside and outside language.[33] The *trait* has a dislocating and dissociating function: it shifts out of line—and, at the same time, it is a gathering force that reconstitutes "integrity in dispersion." In this manner, the drive of the *trait* extends to both sides and thereby connects two unconsciousnesses.[34]

Even color has here, like in Adami's drawing *Freud's Journey*, a position similar to the *trait* when the drawing is no longer a sketch and colors form a differential apparatus. Although for Derrida colors appear in a "gush," they work in a way that resembles the trace of ink or pencil. As it seems, they all are parts of the same system and even obey the same nonmimetic law of the *trait* and of *différance*: "And then *tr* represents, imitates nothing, only engraves a differential trace, therefore no longer a formless cry."[35] Yet, there is perhaps something more to the color's force than the drawing's. First, a color is never anticipated in the drawing, and second, it differs from the drawing because it is restrained. Therefore, color appears more violently and sets into motion the double energy because of the rigor of the divide between *trait* and color.[36] In Adami's works of art, color has the qualities of both an incisive, definitive line and the flood of chromatic scales.[37] The preciseness and sharp lines used in drawing and painting is probably what makes Adami's

work different from most of other paintings analyzed by Derrida—and therefore, perhaps, of a particular interest to him.

Besides the logic of erasure and original supplement, the analysis of Adami's *Ich* offers an example of artistic presentation in that it shows its own presentation. This is the core of Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of art as well: for him, the work of art *exposes the exposition*, or presents the fact that there is something that is presented in the work of art.[38] Adami shows what is passing or happening, forbidden to Derrida's *Glas*, out of range to its signatory. Here, *Ich* "signs the absolute reverse of a text, its other scene, but also shows that it is showing, draws the gallery, the *monstration*, the *exhibition*, or . . . exposes the exhibition."[39] This takes place "into the bargain" (*par-dessus le marché*: literally, "over the market") by putting into play or *en abyme* the destructive simulacra of surplus value.

Derrida's idea of what takes place in a painting resembles Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the sublime and hence unpresentable *now* moment of a work of art.[40] The event is, for Derrida, unnarratable but the narrative moves on (*s'enchaîne*).[41] As always with Adami, what is disarticulated, dissociated, and dislocated, holds itself back, arrested at the same time as it is exhibited: for Derrida it stands for the *dis-jointed* now (*maintenant*) or the unpresentable event of the work of art that forms a work. This formation happens by the force of the *trait*, by joining the scattered fragments, the *disjecta membra*.[42]

CARTOUCHES

In "Cartouches," the problem of the copy and the originality of the copy is illuminated further.[43] "Cartouches" is an analysis of a number of works at Gérard Titus-Carmel's (b. 1942) exhibition *The Pocket Size Tlingit Coffin and the 61 Ensuing Drawings* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in the spring of 1978. Many of the topics of "Cartouches" are motivated by the questions of the supplement and the context. Derrida endeavors to find a vocabulary between the Platonic ideality of the model and the contingence and singularity of drawing and painting.

For Derrida, drawing and painting are beyond all thinking of art that relies upon the model and its image—that is, beyond any mimetic logic of art. In Derrida's account, Titus-Carmel's art organizes itself around a paradigm, which, however, is not a simple object of imitation. The motif in question is the coffin in Titus-Carmel's works; however, Derrida prefers to call the coffin a "paradigm" rather than a "model."[44] At the heart of the inquiry is the image of a cartouche—a box, a case, a cartridge—that appears in *The Pocket Size Tlingit Coffin* series of drawings, pencil sketches, watercolors, and engravings. The matchbox-sized object is repeated in 127 different drawings. As

their "model," Titus-Carmel has employed a box containing a mirror and a pliable wooden oval, which is partly covered in fur and is attached to the box with laces. A plexi-glass lid covers the box, the shape of which resembles a coffin.

The motif of the drawings is thus not an object of nature but an artifact itself, a produced "*fac-simile* of a model," as Derrida calls it.[45] Being itself modeled, the paradigm of the works is therefore not at the origin, since it is itself neither producer nor generator. It seems that the paradigm, in the sense given by Derrida, is itself put under erasure: appears only to withdraw, to disappear.

With a view to the withdrawing paradigm arises the question of whether there exists an "original" box or an original image of it, which would work as a model for all the others. Obviously, Derrida is against the mimetic logic according to which the work of art would have a model or an original, either concrete or ideal: as soon as something presents itself in a painting or drawing, it does not refer to anything original but is already a supplement or *khôra* as proposed by Plato in *Timaeus*. The *khôra* is the place of origin, in which the differences in each presence are outlined. Yet the *khôra*, which is neither being nor nonbeing, itself is a placeless place, an abysmal gap between all oppositions.[46] It cannot be located anywhere, and therefore it exists beyond all form. Like *différance*, the *khôra* is at the same time a temporal and a structural concept and includes a presence that is always postponed. For this reason, the "origin" or the form of things can never refer to full presence for Derrida. It rather exists as trace, whose presence is characterized by its never being real: presence is always put into work, spaced, temporalized, and made into traces.[47] Because the *khôra* is placeless, it is also beyond the truth of *logos*, for only belonging to a place would grant it such truth.[48] Derrida is delineating here an aesthetics in which the form of the work of art becomes already as if reproduced as soon as the work has been made, with no other origin than the endless chain of images. In place of the origin or the model is an abyss; each production is reproduction and original repetition. Hence, the work's fate is to exist *à part*: separately from everything else.[49]

In the context of Titus-Carmel's drawings and paintings, the placeless *khôra* points to a "bastardly" addition that exists in the form of a ghost-like trace or memory: "The 'model' is always the dreamed-of ghost [*le revenant rêvé*]."[50] The model or the original does exist, but only as imagined. This idea resembles many of Derrida's other analyses of art, in which the ideas of seriality, repetition, and the copy are in focus. That the paradigm of the *Tlingit Coffins* cannot be articulated means that we cannot idealize it in the same way as a model; therefore, the paradigm of the images cannot be named either, which makes its existence similar to that of a signature and a proper name. In considering Titus-Carmel's series of drawings arises the question of

the unlimited execution of the coffin: how to frame a cartouche? As Derrida remarks, to ask this corresponds to the question: how to frame a scent?[51]

Derrida's analysis elucidates his thinking of the origin without foundation and the emphasis on the impossibility of the absolute limit. The series of drawings opens up a chasm: none of the images appears as more original than another one and none of them possesses the truth of the pictured motif, the coffin-shaped box, a fabricated object. Is not the difference between the singularity of each drawing and their simultaneous multiplicity the very work of art, which as such proves limitless in both number and variation? The singular drawings are reunited by their heterogeneity and separateness, but in their singularity, they seem untranslatable in the same way that language and drawing belong together by the force of an abyss keeps them apart.[52] In the *Tlingit Coffins*, the differences between the drawings are notable and perhaps even more varied than explained by Derrida: the coffins present a diversity of techniques and media, their use of light and color changes from one image to another and the perspective to each coffin-box varies, so that the differences multiply from drawing to drawing.

In conventional terms, Titus-Carmel's drawings seem to form a theme and variations. However, instead of showing an "original" and its changing reproductions, they unfold the idea that the theme and the variation are inseparable. These aspects coincide in each singular piece—as Derrida emphasizes, their true model is not available in any medium, which makes it like a ghost: no longer are the exhibits copies than originals.[53] In the wake of Derrida's analysis, could we argue that the variation itself of the mysterious, inoperative box is the very motif—in the lack of a more appropriate word—of the *Tlingit Coffin* series, to the extent that the works consist of "supplements" to each other? In making the series, the artist has produced 127 reproductions of reproduction, varying them each time in a new fashion; therefore, it is questionable whether any hierarchical order between the renderings is discernible.

The relentless modifications of the theme vary, however, to the degree that the aspect of change does not, as such, materialize in Derrida's account. The variation seems to be the true site of the subtlety of differences and of the invisible *traits* of Titus-Carmel's drawings. Among them are pencil drawings, either with or without added watercolor, watercolors in both color and in the shades of gray and black, and printmaking realized by a number of techniques: drypoint, aquatint, softground etching and by using photographic methods or mixed media. They make the differences between painting and drawing proliferate.

The employment of the techniques makes the *Tlingit Coffin* drawings almost endlessly nuanced, and only some of them are drawings, whereas a large number of Titus-Carmel's works on exhibit are prints. It is possible to ask in what way they address the truth in *painting*, considering the variation

in the artistic techniques. Derrida writes of "drawings" that expand the category of drawings and "paintings" in which a wholly other media is employed. The variation of techniques seems to bring about two kinds of differences, namely differences in the visual presentation of the coffins and between the combinations of techniques. As a result, it appears that the "subject" of the works, the imagined coffin, and the differences between their presentations already suggests the deconstruction of the work of art as representation. Therefore, a "subject" without subject does not have any unity in the details of the coffins. As Derrida perhaps implies, the general idea, or the concept that would interpret exhaustively what the series might be "about," is to be produced and re-produced by the spectator.

RESTITUTIONS

In "Restitutions," the final essay of *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida's focus is on the controversy about two readings of the painting *Old Shoes with Laces* (1886) by Vincent van Gogh. This debate took place in the late 1960s between art historian Meyer Schapiro and philosopher Martin Heidegger. In addressing the debate, Derrida deconstructs both Schapiro's and Heidegger's critical statements.

The truth is the most central among the themes of "Restitutions": as in "Parergon," Derrida inquires if the art of painting is concerned with the truth spoken *in* painting or the truth spoken *about* painting.[54] The debate touches upon the position of the truth uttered by, on the one hand, the art historian, and on the other, the philosopher. The focus of "Restitutions" is hence on the relation between art and philosophy: under which circumstances are they able to "tell the truth" about painting? Do we possess a truth about art or in art, and how to define it? Are the truths told in different discourses compatible on any conditions, and can they be reconciled with each other at all? This means to ask if there finally exists a possibility of telling the truth about truth—in painting or otherwise.

The debate is motivated by assumptions that differ from each other essentially. In his essay "The Still Life as a Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh" (1968), Meyer Schapiro writes about Heidegger's account of van Gogh's painting in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Schapiro's attention is directed to what he sees to express Heidegger's inability to analyze the peasant shoes as a painted image and an object of cultural history. Schapiro reproaches Heidegger for not being attentive to the internal and the external context of the picture as well as the differential seriality of van Gogh's eight shoe paintings. At the same time, he disregards the philosophical frame of Heidegger's essay.[55]

In "Restitutions," Derrida addresses criticism to both Schapiro's and Heidegger's positions. According to Derrida, in "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger attempts to seek a truth in van Gogh's painting, in his philosophy concerning the work of art or in a *concept* in general, which appears impossible. Therefore, Derrida tries to discover an image outside of the figure, namely, in the trace. The trace, however, cannot be made a figure of, for it is the very possibility of the birth of any figure.[56] This implies that presence of the figure is never real: presence is always put into work, spaced, temporalized, and made into traces.[57] In this sense, its function corresponds to that Derrida's notions of difference and the *trait*.

The position of series and citationality are some of the most important critical points made by Derrida.[58] Seriality is also at stake in Schapiro's criticism leveled at Heidegger: instead of examining a particular painting by van Gogh, in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger seems to refer to *all* of van Gogh's paintings picturing shoes while at the same time speaking of "The Old Shoes," a work that has not been identified reliably, Schapiro points out.[59] As Derrida suggests following Schapiro, the lack of attribution to a particular painting is visible in Heidegger's account.[60] For Derrida, that Heidegger leaves the attribution without notice is a sign of an allegedly "referentialist, monoreferential naïveté,"[61] a note that resonates with Derrida's interest in seriality and repeated, differential *traits*.[62]

Further, Schapiro wonders why Heidegger, being aware that van Gogh painted peasant shoes several times, did not consider this fact.[63] Was it for the sake of Heidegger's wish to avoid empiricism and to maintain the discussion on the level of conceptual analyses? For Heidegger's defense, Derrida suggests that Heidegger's "intention" was not to focus on a given painting, or to describe and interrogate its singularity, as an art critic would do. Instead, Derrida concludes, it might be that Heidegger arrived at constructing a kind of "general picture" of shoes. Schapiro's claim about Heidegger's unwillingness to take into notice the singular features of van Gogh's painting and its context appears understandable, on the condition that a particular painting can be positively verified to be the source of Heidegger's argumentation. This is something that Schapiro puts into doubt, however.[64]

In "Restitutions" arises another question concerning the limits of the work of art. Namely, on what preconditions does the painting lend itself to visual and historical research, as in Schapiro? Alternatively, when does it serve as a site for the unconcealment of Being in its truth and for setting up a world, as in Heidegger's discussion?[65] In Schapiro's opinion, Heidegger uses van Gogh's painting primarily as a visualization of his own theory or as an illustration of thinking. Therefore, it would mean an exemplary piece in Heidegger's attempt to induce universal ideas around art. Schapiro criticizes Heidegger of not looking at the *painting* but merely at the shoes.

Consequently, there appear to be two different subjects at play in Schapiro and Heidegger.[66] The pair of shoes exemplifies Heidegger's concept of "equipment," which the shoes are due to reveal in its truth: in Heidegger's words, "What happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth."[67]

The debate between Heidegger and Schapiro enacts the varieties of "truth" which can be detected by analyzing van Gogh's painting from diverging viewpoints. For Schapiro, the truth of the painting can be said to depend on the fact whether the shoes are a representation of real shoes. As he claims, the picture is supposed to represent and reproduce the pair of shoes belonging to a real subject, to an individual.[68] In this case, the origin and attribution of the shoes provide the criteria for the truth. For Heidegger, in contrast, the question of truth is connected with the truthfulness of the painting as a presentation: in which way do the painted shoes bring forth a philosophical truth set forth by painting? The truth implied by the painting as presentation refers mainly to itself and does not depend on the attribution of the shoes or the painterly medium, but on what *happens* in the painting and how it thus discloses a certain aspect of being.

To discover the stakes of the debate, Derrida deconstructs both Heidegger's and Schapiro's arguments. In considering the structured nature of their positions, Derrida's analysis is explicitly deconstructive: his primary interest is in the claims pronounced in the debate, in the narratives included in their reading, and in the language that their claims generate.[69] According to Derrida, the contexts of the dispute are multiplied to domains that were not covered by Schapiro and Heidegger; also, each perspective produced by Derrida's analysis works as a new context and supplement to the debate. Derrida extends his discussion to a whole tradition of presenting shoes in art and a citational intertextuality that follows: René Magritte's surrealist painting *Le Modèle rouge* (1935) offers an example of this. Magritte made several paintings in which boots and feet seem to grow together, thus forming an image that Derrida calls "psychoanalytical." Like Titus-Carmel's *Pocket Size Tlingit Coffins*, Magritte's versions of *Le Modèle rouge* are incompatible with the notion of art as imitation. For a long time, Derrida remarks, conformity with being has been considered equivalent to the essence and, hence, criterion of truth.[70] He finds this principle still visible in Schapiro, who would thus seem to presuppose that Heidegger would compare van Gogh's shoes to reality, although probably no one would compare Magritte's pair of shoes to any realistic imitation. Derrida hereby points to the complexity of the notions of exemplarity and illustration. He leaves the reader to ask the question what works of art are examples of, if anything—or if they exemplify their own existence as works of art, which, as such, proves ultimately indefinable.

THE UNTRANSLATABLES: THE SIGNATURE AND THE TITLE

In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida draws an evident parallel between the work of art, the proper name, and the signature. Like the work of art, he claims, the proper name and the signature exist outside all discursivity: they name an event in a particular context, therefore being untranslatable into any other language.[71] Examples of untranslatable language, such as idioms and a dialect, are related to the ellipticity of language: if these existed in completely pure forms, they would be able to reveal language to their own chance.[72] What cannot be translated refers to completely pure idiomatic expressions, such as "truth in painting" is a performative expression to Derrida. The untranslatable remains outside of discourses and knowledge, being thus undecidable and impossible, or what is never said and what can be understood in many ways—like the idiom of "the truth in painting." Among untranslatable and thus unsolved features of language is that which pertains to *the thing itself*: "the truth in painting" as the truth of the truth, and that which relates, therefore, to adequate *representation*, in other words, to fiction.[73]

If the "work of art" is supposed to be fundamentally indeterminable, this reminds Derrida of an absolute idiom or a proper name that cannot be translated into any language of thinking. For him, the work of art resists being turned into any other means of expression, being "not consumable."[74] Like the performative expressions of language, it withstands all discursive analysis: "If there is a work, it is because, even when all the conditions that could make it a subject of analysis have been fulfilled, something happens again, something that we call the 'signature,' the 'work.' "[75]

Signature

Both the work of art, especially painting, and the signature are characterized by the radical singularity of their *traits* that are both inimitable and yet repeatable. Inside the work, the *traits* function as a signature and pass through the proper name or the "patronym" or through the draughtsman's inimitable idiom.[76] On such grounds, painted words appear on the limit of the visual and the linguistic for Derrida. How this limit is constituted appears to be the question: how do language and the image encounter in the proper name and the signature in specific? Further, what is the position of the signature, placed on the frame of a painting where words, like images, belong to realm of the visible?[77]

In traditional terms, the signature implies the presence of the author, the source of the trace. However, Derrida's notion of the signature differs from this idea: for him, the signature is not related to its author in the sense of

marking the having-been of his or her presence, for the presence of the past "now" is not able to guarantee any signification to the signature. It thus operates in the same way as a text which can be detached from its original context and moved to another, so that it works differently and produces new meanings.

Writing is always detached from its moment of production and hence from the author and abandoned to its essential drift. Like proper names, the signature represents a special case of writing in that it is expected to be at once authentic and unique to the specific situation of its inscription, but also to have an iterable and imitable form. Therefore, the signature is, paradoxically, both a singular and repeatable *event*: in Derrida's words, "the absolute singularity of a signature-event and a signature-form: the pure reproducibility of a pure event."[78] By definition, the writing of the signature necessitates the actual, empirical presence of the signer. However, to function and to be readable, Derrida requires that a signature must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production. The signature thereby signifies the absence of the writer, but it also denotes the presence of the signer in the past, and can be taken as a substitute for the signer's physical presence. Moreover, the signature implies the presence of the reader in the future or present.

In a way that resembles the functioning of the signature, Cézanne's statement "I owe you the truth in painting and I will tell it to you," one of the key sentences of *The Truth in Painting*, does not describe or represent anything: the sentence does not operate in the mode of statement or assertion (*constat*). It says nothing that exists outside the event that it constitutes. Instead, it commits the signatory with an utterance that the theorists of speech acts call "performative," more exactly a "promise."[79] As a result, every work of art is comparable to a speech act in the same way as the unpayable "debt" pronounced by Cézanne—the debt of the painter, which obliges him to promise that he will show the "truth" in the painting. As it seems, such truth is for Derrida the truth of the singularity of each work of art: a work of art provides a truth concerning itself, like the proper name in the signature.[80]

In *Signsponge*, Derrida presents the three modalities of signature.[81] First, there is the common notion that signature represents the proper name and is articulated in a language and is readable as such. In this case, the signature authenticates the fact that it is, indeed, the author who writes and, in writing, refers to him- or herself. Derrida calls this second modality "a banal and confused metaphor for the first" and defines it as the set of idiomatic marks that a signer might leave, either by accident or intention, in his or her product. These marks, such as the style or the inimitable idiom, have then no essential link with the form of the proper name as articulated "in" a language. The third modality is the general signature or the signature, the

placement in abyss, where the work of writing designates, describes, and inscribes itself as an act. On such basis, it is possible to read the signature as "I refer to myself." Derrida's discussion of the signature and the hieroglyph shows that the importance of the singular coherence of meaning within a text will always be undone. He holds that the "extrinsic" signature written on the work of art will not guarantee any "intrinsic" meaning, such as the authorship of the work and its attribution to the artist who has signed it. If it did, the signature, understood as a sign of intentionality, would act as the frame of the work. With this argument, Derrida aims at deconstructing the notion of identity and self-presence that would point to the referent directly and without remainder or to supposed a relation between the artist's biography and his or her works.[82] Derrida's idea of the signature largely parallels Michel Foucault's notion of the author: rather than being a single source of a work or text, the author's function is a larger set of beliefs or assumptions that determine the production, circulation, classification, and consumption of texts.[83]

Derrida's discussion of Gérard Titus-Carmel's installation *The Great Cultural Banana Plantation* (*La Grande Bananeraie Culturelle*, 1969–1970) provides an example of the undoing of the signature that would supposedly guarantee the presence of the author.[84] The installation consists of one "true" or "natural" banana and fifty-nine "false fruits" made of plastic. In the original version at the City of Paris Museum of Modern Art in 1969, the bananas were each mounted on a small platform on the wall. As time passed by, the natural banana decayed, whereas the fabricated ones stayed intact. Derrida notes that there exists a difference between the "model" and the "copies." Yet, he acknowledges that the model is already part of the exhibited series, the "father" banana and its "instinct, indistinguishable, more or less anonymous subsidiaries [*filiales*]": "But just when this difference (model/copy, 'father/offspring,' Plato would say) is the most clearly marked, the model (fruit or father, as you will) is totally rotten, decomposed, analyzed, fallen. It no longer functions: defunct (*defunctus*) the 'natural' model."[85] In this interpretation, he undoes any hierarchical relation between the original fruit and its imitations. Hence, the plastic bananas, "the subsidiaries," are no longer copies, nor are they originals, but contingent in the sense that they cannot be idealized like a model; nothing rises above the organic decomposition of the "natural" banana. They would, rather, be *phantasmata* or copies of copies without example if the force of a *ductus*, or the idiom of the draughtsman, "did not carry the *remainder beyond any phantasy*, beyond the signature, the proper name, and even the nameable."[86] As the possibility of ideality is lost in *The Great Cultural Banana Plantation*, it cannot even be named; the paradigm that the natural model is supposed to provide is deposed of its privilege with respect to the fifty-nine simulacra.

The complex relation between language and the visual permeates Derrida's reflection of art. In considering their connections, the notion of the signature marks a specific point: it is situated between the linguistic and the visual in that it contains the character of untranslatability. The signature is a primary example of writing that cannot be transformed into any other language or means of expression; instead, it is a performative example of an event as well as an "original" or "authentic" mark of the author. This is what makes it similar to the image, although the signature simultaneously belongs to the sphere of writing. In addition, any work of art is composed of a multiplicity of elements, which are untranslatable in their context and unique composition: techniques, styles, themes, traits, and details. In each work, their composition is unprecedented; from this Derrida argues that the resulting work of art does not fit into the existing conception of art or the available discourses. As such, the work serves as a supplement to what is comprehended by "art": nothing will assure beforehand that it corresponds to what was understood to be "a work of art" previously, before the coming into being of that particular work.[87]

Accordingly, the work of art would be comparable to the speech act and the signature. Both are singular by nature, since they cannot be translated into any other language or means of expression. This condition applies especially to painting and its colors. The art of painting, exemplified by Salvatore Puglia's *Intus Ubique* (1986), is to Derrida "writing as such" and "implosion of words and proper names."[88] It is beyond everything that is utterable, which also means that it does not any longer belong to the sphere of *logos*. Because of its inescapable singularity, the notion of the work of art is never fully part of its discourse: "If there is a work, it is because, even when all the conditions that could become the object of an analysis have been met, something still happens, something we call the signature, the work, if you wish."[89]

The Title of the Work

The title of a work of art and words inscribed inside a work, such as painted, drawn, or otherwise attached words, are special cases when considering the use of language. Such use of words makes them neither purely linguistic nor purely visual, or they are both at once. In this respect, they are comparable to simulacra: words in the painting merely expose themselves on the surface of the canvas, where they have a differential effect in that they create space. Therefore, painted words seem to end up in an infinite gap between the verbal and the nonverbal, or between the linguistic and the visual, "mute" expression. If the painting contains words, Derrida says, they only appear as something and feel like something (*semblent*) but do not have any unified meaning (*sans (se) rassembler*): they are divided without identifying with anything.[90] However, words in paintings resemble *themselves*: "*they do not sound, they*

look like words," but they may nevertheless resonate with different things.[91] It follows that the words in painting work in the same way as the signature and the proper name, which refer to their truth, namely their own fact of existence. At the same time, they refer to the absence of the author, the sign being nonetheless a sign of his or her presence at the point of leaving the mark.

Between the visible and the verbal, there is a discrepancy: no representative tie (*lien*) between the drawing and the writing exists.[92] Among this linguistic material are words inscribed in the work of art and the title given to the work by the artist. Words that appear on the pictorial surface of the work exist for Derrida both inside and outside of it. Being inside the work means that, as artistic elements, they are *traits* of the work of art and form a necessary part of it. Thus, words have a differentiating function on the painted or drawn surface. Being at the same time inside and outside is to say that at once the words refer to their own existence, they refer to all other writing. Therefore, they are in a state of oscillation, being the simultaneously "subject" and the "ground" of the image.[93]

For Derrida, the title does not simply indicate the "subject" of the work. If this were the case, the title and the work would be exchangeable in that the title would restrict itself to signaling the linguistic meaning of the painting insofar as the title names its "subject." Namely, as Derrida says, the title does not interfere with the work but remains extrinsic to it, even so that it can pass for the work by exposing what is essential to its spatial arrangement and its colors. Conversely, the painting gives its proper place to the name it possesses: to quote Derrida, the painting "is not *called* by this or that name, but it *calls forth* its own name."[94] The title is thus finally destined to reside outside the work. In the absence of a name—if the work of art is called *Without Title*, as it often is—the mute work of art will leave the spectator alone, at the mercy of the "affect" produced by the work. Derrida concludes: "Any painting, any painting *as such*, and even if it apparently has and bears, as its 'subject,' a title, that is to say a name . . ., any painting worthy of the name, is *as such*, therefore, designed for doing without name, that is, without title."[95] In fact, since the affect exceeds language, it effaces the title or theme given to the work. Even if the work of art has a name, it names only what already belongs to the work *as* work.

Jean-Luc Nancy argues for similar ideas about the significance of the title of the work. Indeed, he seems to comment on Derrida's analysis in the essay "The Title's a Blank," in which he discusses the Austrian painter Susanna Fritscher (b. 1960).[96] Nancy's point of departure is not exactly the title, but rather its absence, or absence *as* the very title of the painting: absence offers itself as the beginning of things, as well as the painting means the beginning of things. In Derrida, the title never "names" what takes place in the painting, whereas for Nancy the painting, in fact, *begins* where the title ends. The

end of the title thus produces a site for the event of the painting; a site that is equal to what Derrida terms "affect."[97] The proper name inscribed in the painting does not give anything but this unnameable space, which means the "the space-time of a beginning, spacing of a time, the time of a spacing," and thus simultaneously the birth of the artist.[98]

For both Derrida and Nancy, the title is neither a proper nor a common name. It does not signify, nor is it a sign, but presents merely a gap of signification. Instead, the title must be understood as the place of pure materiality and of the painterly gesture, through which the artist touches the canvas with paint and "paint touches itself and itself, without beginning or end"; here is the beginning and the end of paint.[99] The title yields an empty space for the birth of a singular work: in Nancy's opinion, the title does not say anything but rather indicates that there is everything, or nothing, to be said.[100] The title thus points only to the fact that there is something and something begins with the existence of the title—this is rendered by the *il y a*, "there is," which *is* the title itself, the title of all titles and the blank of the title. "There is" is the division of saying and thing.[101]

In considering the singularity of the title, Nancy's thinking largely corresponds to Derrida's notion of the signature and its irreducible, even if repeatable, uniqueness. The notion of the title opens up a singular space for any kind of event, or the performativity of painting. On these grounds, it seems that Nancy and Derrida present approximately the same idea concerning the significance of the title, yet from inverse viewpoints. They both emphasize the importance of the title—Derrida by showing its singularity and performativity which join the title to the singularity and performativity of the work of art, and Nancy by stating that the title is a "blank," an empty space, which does not say anything or have a discursive meaning but, instead, makes everything possible. Therefore, the title expresses pure spatialization and is a place of *différance*.

Not all titles are similar in what concerns the choice of words, for titles can be divided according to the nouns employed in them: they contain both common and proper names. Proper names represent performative and thus inimitable events in titles. For Derrida, the use of proper names makes the work of art a singular performative in two ways: first, as a painting, and second, in the name's reference to the singularity of a person or a place. The names of Jean-Michel Atlan's paintings, such as *Le Grand Roi Atlante, Baal Guerrier*, or *Les Miroirs de l'Asie*, oscillate between the proper and the common by including a proper name into the common name.[102] Placed between the singular and the common, they make the common name into a proper one.

In speaking of art, affect means what exceeds language, like the effects of music, dance, and colors.[103] To Derrida, the affect is essentially associated with

the singularity of the work: it means the desire to maintain the inseparability of the work and its material support and, due to their inseparateness, to save the immunity of the work.[104] The affect is the connection between the artist's and the spectator's body to the corpus of the work, but it is also the inseparability of the figure and the ground of the work of art. In Derrida, the affect has the meaning of "keeping the unique trace" of the work, of which the signature also offers an example; thus, the affect is the moment of "poetic invention" in the originary production before any kind of reproduction and in the inaugural moment of artistic creation. There, the singularity of the unique trace shows itself, and the artist's body and the body of the work of art are inseparable.

Words in painting have a specific function in Derrida's analysis. Each sign presents a limit in itself in its appearance in which the visual and the linguistic are inseparable. From this follows that painted words redouble or multiply the painting's sense or affect. The limit and the context that it brings about immediately takes a work of art or a text toward new directions, namely, the unlimited nature of the context. At the same time, in the singularity of the work—its separateness that causes its existence to be apart of everything else—something is cut out and comes to be perceived *as* something, but each time differently according to the context. At this point appears the question of the ground: without materiality of the ground to which the image is attached, the whole idea of the work of art is unthinkable. In addition, each thing forms a "ground" for all other things, being inseparable from the materiality—the ground—of everything else.[105]

Derrida's main philosophical concern is to show here that writing and meaning remain separate. This idea implies that one has no access to the *traits* that have been traced outside of words, "to the other features, to the features of others."[106] Only the shadow of their own tracing reveals a truth of writing: for it, one has to reach to words outside words, to meaning outside of meaning. It is not a question of science, but of knowledge of what exceeds distinctions, the knowledge of the *grammē*, that is, of the *trait* in general which is such only on the condition of its singularity. Derrida's treatise of writing and of art, being an instance of writing, thus point beyond the supposed transparency of anything that might be called "pure meaning."

The works of art analyzed by Derrida offer evidence of what is essential to deconstruction: to what remains from all-encompassing systems and beyond the philosophical illusion that the signification of things could be discovered and brought to light. In art, Derrida finds an original a noncoincidence between the visible and the meaning, and his numerous analyses of works of art and the nonverbal in art manifest this noncoincidence.[107] In *Memoirs of the Blind*, he brings out that the visible in art is born out of the invisible: the image is always to be seen beyond representation or significations.[108] The visible in the works of art is not a simple fact, but it is dependent on the invisible:

the visible is constantly on the verge of becoming invisible in the process where different nonvisible things, like memories and thoughts, emerge in the spectator. Yet their relation is not dialectical, nor are they simple oppositions, but their positions are alternate: a thing becomes discernible because, at the same time, there is something that remains out of perception. The thing that we distinguish in art is neither a "view" (*vue*), nor is it anything subjective or objective as such. Rather, it is a trace of the figurable, a painting, for example.[109] The visible is conditioned by the sphere of the invisible, to which thinking, memory, and associations belong.

The encounter between the radical singularity of the artwork and language is dependent on the notion of the work of art as a field of appearing and disappearing traces and *traits*. For this reason, it is a site of *différance*: something becomes apparent only by retreating from the spectator's vision and thinking. In looking at art, only the difference (*écart*) of the visible and blindness comes to be "seen," for the abyss between them appears but only by disappearing. This means that vision is not self-identical, but instead, the visible and the invisible disappear mutually. It is evident that speaking of art proves an impossible task for the philosopher, who is destined to meet the silence—the "secret" of art, which only expresses itself "by saying nothing."[110] Derrida encounters the question that deconstruction is obliged to face in front of painting and all art: how may one listen to such silence?

NOTES

1. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 287–366 ("Dissemination") (*La dissémination*, 319–407). Cf. Gregory Ulmer, "Op Writing: Derrida's Solicitation of *Theoria*," in *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983), 32–33.

2. Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry,"* 142.

3. Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 8 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 375).

4. Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 67 ("The Third Meaning," 1970).

5. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 109 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 124).

6. Cf. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 116–118 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 133–135). "Economimesis," Derrida's essay on Kant and mimesis, was published in 1975, one year after the first version of "Parergon." Mimesis will be discussed in more length in chapter 6.

7. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 1–27 ("Différance").

8. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 118 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 135).

9. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 184 ("Sauver les phénomènes").

10. See Jacques Derrida, *Signature Derrida*, ed. Jay Williams (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press Journals, 2013; "What Is a 'Relevant' Translation?," trans. Lawrence Venuti), 355–356.

11. Masó, "Illustrer, photographier," 361.

12. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 131–135 ("Illustrer, dit-il"); cf. Derrida, *Spurs*; *The Truth in Painting*, 311 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 354–355).

13. Masó, "Illustrer, photographier."

14. Melville, "Color Has Not Yet Been Named," 41.

15. To elucidate his claim, Andrew Benjamin takes up two formulations in Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art*: "We choose as example (*Wir wählen als Beispeil*) a common sort of equipment—a pair of peasant shoes," and "We shall choose (*Wir wählen*) a well-known painting by Van Gogh, who painted such shoes several times." Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 32–33; Andrew Benjamin, "Matter and Movement's Presence: Notes on Heidegger, Francesco Mosca, and Bernini," *Research in Phenomenology* 42, no. 3 (2012): 372.

16. Derrida takes up this question in the essay "Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [*pointure*]," in which he discusses the dispute about the nature of the work of art from two divergent perspectives, namely Heidegger's and art historian Meyer Schapiro's. *The Truth in Painting*, 255–382, esp. 299, 311, 353 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 342, 354–355, 403). See also Galard, "L'œuvre exappropriée," 89–90.

17. This thought was proposed by Heidegger and later, in different formulations, by deconstructionist thinkers. Melville, "Color Has Not Yet Been Named," 41.

18. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 15–147 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 19–135).

19. This painting, *La piscina*, dates from 1966.

20. At least *Ritratto di Walter Benjamin* exists also as painting (1973, acrylic on canvas), which suggests that the drawing printed on page 176 of *The Truth in Painting* (in *La Vérité en peinture*, page 201) is either a sketch for a colored painting or another version of Benjamin's portraits.

21. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 139 ("Le dessein du philosophe") and 143 ("À dessein, le dessin"); *Memoirs of the Blind*, 53–54 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 58); see also Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 237–238.

22. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 44 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 48).

23. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 144 ("À dessein, le dessin"): "[le trait] donne à voir sans se donner lui-même à voir."

24. Lyotard, *Que peindre? / What to Paint?*, 189.

25. Lyotard, *Que peindre? / What to Paint?*, 193.

26. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 156–162; the drawing is pictured on page 158 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 178–185). The name *Ich*, chosen by Derrida, has a Greek etymology: the Greek word for "fish" is *ichthys*, fish being also the symbol for Christ who was called the "fisher of men." In addition, *ich*, of course, means "I" in German.

27. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 152; image p. 158 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 172, image p. 179).

28. Heidegger's strategy of placing words or terms "under erasure" means crossing out inaccurate words yet leaving them legible. To write "under erasure" is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion; Heidegger's word for this is *Durchstreichung*. The word is inaccurate (which itself is an inaccurate word), hence the cross, yet the word is necessary, hence the printing of the word. Derrida links Heidegger's strategy with negative theology's avoidance of

the name of God. See Martin Heidegger, *The Question on Being*, trans. Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback (New Haven: College & University Press, 1958/1956), 80–83.

29. Spivak, "Translator's Preface," xiv; Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 19, 31.

30. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 282 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 414).

31. Lyotard, *Que peindre? / What to Paint?*, 183.

32. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 171 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 196).

33. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 172–174 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 196–200).

34. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 163 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 187). Derrida quotes here the words of Jacques Dupin, a French poet and art critic.

35. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 174 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 199). The work of art that Derrida calls *Freud's Journey* is not pictured in *The Truth in Painting*; instead, one can find on page 173 the drawing *La meccanica dell'avventura*, in which one may see train tracks. In fact, Adami has produced different versions of lithographs and other prints in varied colors as well as a painting in acrylic with the title *S. Freud in viaggio verso Londra* (1973).

36. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 172 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 196).

37. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 172 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 196).

38. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 163 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 187); cf. Nancy, *The Muses*, 18–20.

39. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 163 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 185).

40. Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 135–143 (*L'Inhumain*, 101–118: "Le sublime et l'avant-garde," 1984).

41. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 163 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 187).

42. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 167 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 192).

43. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 185–247 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 213–290).

44. See Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 177.

45. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 194 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 223).

46. Derrida, *Khôra*, 46–47.

47. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 11–13 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 12–14); Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, 157.

48. Derrida, *Khôra*, 57.

49. Nathalie Roelens, "Les chaussures de van Gogh, suite," in *Jacques Derrida et l'esthétique*, ed. Nathalie Roelens (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), 99. To the figure of the separateness and nonreciprocal existence of the work of art, Roelens sees a point of comparison in Derrida's notion of spectrality, the presence of absence, which is part of his theory of film and photography. See Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, esp. 113–134.

50. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 215–217 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 247–248).

51. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 222 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 254–255).

52. For Ann Van Sevenant's analysis of the forces of reunion and disjunction, see "Le disjoint fait œuvre," 72–77; Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 156–158, 166–167 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 178–180, 192); *Penser à ne pas voir*, 182–183 ("Sauver les

phénomènes"). For painting and the idea of force, see also Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981), trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 56–64, 154–161.

53. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 217–219 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 248–249).

54. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 282 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 322).

55. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 285 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 325).

56. Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent," 304.

57. Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, 157.

58. Like in his analyses of photography and paintings, such as Colette Deblé's wash paintings in the 1990s, seriality offers a central perspective to his arguments, as do the notions of repetition and difference. On photography, see for example "Une lecture de *Droit de regards*" and *Demeure, Athènes*. In these essays, pictures appear as series and form narratives; on painting, *Prégnances* with works executed with similar technique, or *Memoirs of the Blind*, in which the common theme, blindness, creates a sense of seriality to the works of art. Cf. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 308, 311 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 351–352, 354–355).

59. Schapiro, "The Still Life as a Personal Object."

60. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 311 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 354–355).

61. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 309 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 352).

62. For seriality in Derrida's accounts of art, see Thomas Rösch, *Kunst und Dekonstruktion: Serielle Ästhetik in den Texten von Jacques Derrida* (Wien: Passagen, 2008).

63. Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 33f.

64. Schapiro, "The Still Life as a Personal Object," 297–298.

65. Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 28–29.

66. For Derrida's discussion of the subject and the underneath—the context—of the discussion, see *The Truth in Painting*, 285–286.

67. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 36; Schapiro, "The Still Life as a Personal Object," 298. For Derrida's account, see *The Truth in Painting*, 311–317 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 354–363).

68. Yet, Derrida remarks, it is difficult to assure if "the real" shoes resemble their authentic model and unfold their owner. For him, the shoe already forms a prosthesis; perhaps the foot does too, as "it can always be someone else's." *The Truth in Painting*, 312 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 356).

69. Cf. Nancy, "Éloquentes rayures," 15–16.

70. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 315–317 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 362).

71. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 307–330 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 365–393).

72. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 4–5 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 8–9).

73. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 5 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 9).

74. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 39: "l'œuvre d'art 'n'est pas consommable'" ("Les arts de l'espace").

75. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 47 ("Les arts de l'espace").

76. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 10 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 14–15).

77. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 180 ("Sauver les phénomènes").

78. Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 20 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 391).

79. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 3 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 7).

80. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 188 ("Sauver les phénomènes").

81. Jacques Derrida, *Signéponge / Signsponge* (1976), trans. Richard Rand (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 52, 54. In *Of Grammatology* (110–111; *De la grammatologie*, 158–159), Derrida already states that a proper name cannot signify only a uniqueness. This is because it is part of a classificatory system and it is composed of repeatable phonemes.

82. Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 119.

83. Michel Foucault, "What Is the Author?," in *Modernity and its Discontents*, eds. James L. Marsh, John D. Caputo and Merold Westphal (New York: Fordham UP, 1992), 304. (Originally published as "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?," *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, 63e année, no. 3 [juillet–septembre 1969]: 73–104.)

84. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 217–219 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 248–251).

85. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 217 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 249).

86. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 218, cf. 10 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 249, cf. 14–15). For a discussion of *The Great Cultural Banana Plantation* from the point of film theory, see Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 178–179.

87. In principle, this statement means that as soon as the artist produces a new work of art, it may change the entire category of art by putting into question its ways of presentation and, eventually, the concept of art with its tradition (cf. Nancy, "Why Are There Several Arts, and Not Just One?," in *The Muses*). At the same time, works of art are always fragments, but as fragments, they exist separately from one another and even in "abandonment": they do not form a part of a larger whole (of the general concept of "art," for example). This thought originates from the theory of Early Romanticism. See also Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*; Heikkilä, "At the Limits of Presentation," 240–248.

88. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 186 ("Sauver les phénomènes").

89. Brunette and Wills, "The Spatial Arts," 28. ("S'il y a une œuvre, c'est parce que, même quand toutes les conditions qui pourraient faire l'objet d'une analyse ont été remplies, quelque chose arrive encore, quelque chose que nous appelons la 'signature', l''œuvre', si vous voulez." *Penser à ne pas voir*, 47.)

90. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 182.

91. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 183. English and italics in the original.

92. See Masó, "Illustrer, photographier," 361–362.

93. Cf. Derrida's reference to *Glas*: "Who signs? Who reads? Who looks and de-picts the other?" *The Truth in Painting*, 166 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 189–190).

94. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 235: "Elle ne *s'appelle* pas de tel ou tel nom, elle *appelle* un nom." ("De la couleur à la lettre.") In speaking of the absence of the title, Jean-Luc Nancy quotes these words in *Multiple Arts*, 185.

95. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 235: "Toute peinture, toute peinture *en tant que telle*, et même si en apparence elle porte et supporte, comme son 'sujet', un titre, c'est-à-dire un nom . . ., toute peinture digne de ce nom, donc, *en tant que telle*, a vocation à se passer de nom, je veux dire de titre."

96. Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 181–190.
97. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 251f. ("Les 'dessous' de la peinture, de l'écriture et du dessin").
98. Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 184.
99. Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 184.
100. Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 185.
101. Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 185.
102. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 235–236 ("De la couleur à la lettre").
103. Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 235–236.
104. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 250–251 ("Les 'dessous' de la peinture, de l'écriture et du dessin: support, substance, sujet, suppôt et supplice").
105. Cf. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 248.
106. Nancy, "Éloquentes rayures," 19.
107. Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent," 298.
108. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 2 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 10).
109. Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent," 298.
110. Jacques Derrida, *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), 167.

Chapter 6

Mimesis as Difference

The theme of mimesis has been present throughout the history of Western philosophy. The classical notion of mimesis, understood as imitation or representation, has resulted in a hierarchical ontology that consists of unchanging truths, varying perceptions of the world and their representations that may be truthful as well as potentially misleading. In the postwar continental philosophy, the hierarchy between truth and image, or the original and the copy, has come under criticism.[1] In this framework, deconstructionist thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Jean-Luc Nancy have devised original approaches to mimesis and mimetic relations. To examine it, it is necessary to clarify the shift from the classical notion of mimesis to the deconstructionist one. Both approaches begin from enquiring the relation between mimesis and truth, while the conditions of truth and its operations in the two accounts of mimesis often appear as diverse and even contrary.

The opposition between the classical mimesis and the mimesis suggested by deconstructionist theories can be perceived in interrelated contexts: first, in definitions of mimesis, secondly, in the deconstruction of the notion of truth conceived as presence, and thirdly, in the deconstructionist differentiation between representation and presentation. More exactly, how to describe the shift from the classical mimesis and its notion of truth as the production of sameness to the deconstructionist idea that rather emphasizes mimesis as the production of difference and untruth? For Lacoue-Labarthe, for example, mimesis does have a sense of production, but it is possible to produce mimetically both truth and illusion, for the reason that mimesis stands for fiction; that is, the manner in which the world produces itself.[2] In several recent theories of mimesis art and the concept of the image have become central. How to describe the nature of changes that the deconstructionist understanding of

mimesis has brought about in the understanding of art, the work of art and its presentation?

THE CONCEPT OF MIMESIS: FROM CLASSICAL THEORIES TO POSTSTRUCTURALISM

The notion of mimesis has its origins in the philosophy of Antiquity, where it denotes imitation and representation. At that time, mimesis was essentially connected with art and aesthetics: art was the foremost means of imitation that was supposed to imitate reality and make truthful images of the world. Plato gave the best-known formulation for this concept in the dialogues of the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, and the mimetic principle defined by Plato and his followers remained the foundation for theories of art until the nineteenth century. At this point, the thought of art as imitation of reality began to be gradually discarded and art was seen to be more the subjective expression of the artist.

Plato's theory of Forms or Ideas argues that there exists a realm of non-physical ideas, which represents the ultimate reality.[3] Because these ideas are changeless, they are imperceptible, incorporeal, and eternal. We can come to have knowledge of Ideas or Forms only through thought. In the Platonic critique of mimesis, its danger is the undermining of a stable notion of truth, which is threatened by duplicitous copies of mere appearances.[4] Thus, for Plato the Idea or Form of a thing enjoys a higher status than the particulars or actual things, which merely participate in the one intelligible, unchanging Idea. In this theory, art has a position of a specific kind, since it is double imitation: while it is not the imitation of ideas, it is the imitation of the things of the actual world. As a consequence, art is even more distanced from Ideas and Forms than the perceptible reality. Since art is supposed to mimic the phenomena of the actual world, it stands apart from nature and truth; art has thus a negative connotation in Plato.

Aristotle's view on mimesis differs from Plato's in some essential aspects: for Aristotle, mimesis is something that nature and humans have in common. It is embedded in man's creative process, and imitation is a "natural" human inclination: this is because man "is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation."[5] Fundamentally, the Aristotelian mimesis means the imitation of *physis* or nature. According to Aristotle's famous words in *Physics*, "In general, art either imitates the works of nature or completes that which nature is unable to bring into completion. . . . The relation of that which comes after to that which goes before is the same in both."[6] This claim largely corresponds with Aristotle's discussion in the *Poetics*, where he states that art is imitation of what is both actual and potential in

nature. Furthermore, for Aristotle, things happen in art as they do in nature, or they happen in the same order. The Aristotelian mimesis is therefore to be understood as *poiesis*, "creation" or "making": for example, mimesis is the *process* of making poetry.[7]

Plato's thinking has been a primary point of departure to most classical and modern theories of mimesis. They are often founded on the philosophical notion of an opposition between the real and the unreal, or the original and the inauthentic. Since Antiquity, mimesis has referred to the reproduction of forms of nature: according to them, nature represents truth, which is imitated in human activities. Therefore, mimesis has stood for the imitation of truth and the true, and the mimetic operation creates illusion with respect to reality.

The scope of mimesis did not begin to change until the twentieth century. By abandoning the thought of mimesis as imitation, recent continental philosophers especially have strived to reconsider critically the notion of mimesis and its implications to the tradition of Western metaphysics. In contemporary theories, the general emphasis is on the connection of mimesis to the thinking on being, as well as on the mimetic processes involved in subjectivity and intersubjective relations.[8]

Mimesis has proved to possess multiple meanings and levels, and it can be both positive and negative in its implications. In general, theories of mimesis are founded upon the question as to whether imitation, description, mimicking, or representation corresponds to its original referent, be it example, model, reality, idea, or nature such supposed. Correspondence can be more or less complete, and it can take different forms, such as imitation, presentation, mimicking, representation, similitude, resemblance, transformation, idealization, generalization, and perfection.[9] These all presuppose a thought of similarity or sameness between things, as can be perceived in Plato's and Aristotle's definitions already, where truth appears as a correspondence between things.[10] This idea has created the basis for the correspondence theory of truth, which claims that the truth or falsity of a statement corresponds to the relevant fact, that is, the actual state of affairs. In this theory, truth is related to reality, although their correlation can be defined in a variety of ways: the concepts associated with truth, *mimesis* and *homoiosis* in Greek and *adaequatio* in Latin, are all names for "correspondence."[11] However, beginning from the nineteenth century and especially during the recent decades the correspondence theory, or the theory of mimesis as producing a relation of similarity between reproduction and the original (or wording and reality), has been radically questioned. In place of identity and similarity, philosophers have taken an interest in the *difference* between one kind of rendering and another, or one reproduction and another. At the same time, the traditional opposition between original and reproduction has been called into question.

A new kind of view on mimesis arose as a philosophical theme in Critical Theory, especially in the work of Theodor Adorno and, to a certain extent, Walter Benjamin. Behind their new interest in mimesis was the aim of redefining antirepresentation. This was the point of departure for poststructuralist and deconstructive theories of mimesis; this endeavor was motivated by the understanding of language, deriving from the critique of structuralism. The conventional notion of mimesis as imitation of the external world proved insufficient in both theories in art and in the more general philosophical formulations concerning our representations of the world. In them, the primary grounds for criticizing mimesis were the suspicion of a belief in the fixity of meaning and the possibility of achieving full presence that would include the recirculation of present things.[12]

As pointed out above, the traditional notion of mimesis presupposes that mimesis is understood in terms of the essence of truth, truth being identity between things and generation of meanings. These notions now become the object of doubt. Compared to the ancient and classical theories of mimesis, the emphasis of the recent French thinkers is not on mimesis as the production of sameness and similarity, but to the contrary, on the thought of difference and its production. Because of mimesis, it is possible to perceive and discern things. During the past decades, mimesis has been thought to provide differentiation, which implies neither the production of similarity nor pure dissimilarity.

In a wider scale, the poststructuralist critique of mimesis is based on the questioning of a unified ground or one Being "in general," which would offer the basis for the particularization of things. Instead of such a notion of "Being," Derrida and especially Lacoue-Labarthe have brought forth the significance of contextuality and repetition in the production of meanings.[13] In Lacoue-Labarthe and Derrida, the notions of the image, representation, and truth are interconnected, and their critique of mimesis is targeted against the "naïve" referentialism of naturalist and realist aesthetics alike. Mimesis, the key concept of Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophy, does not refer only to artistic representation or imitation, but to the origin of all things. Like in Derrida's thinking, mimesis for Lacoue-Labarthe is a logic of production: neither does it appear as such, nor can it be defined or conceptualized. According to them, one cannot suppose forms of being that would be more original than other forms. This is because the context from which meanings emerge can never be fully determined, no meaning can be final and ultimate or fully present to itself, so that it could be reproduced in another context: any sense of an ultimate meaning will unavoidably escape the one who speaks or writes. Therefore, the foundation of especially Derrida's and Lacoue-Labarthe's critique of mimesis is to be found in the notion that no single meaning can be present "as such." Namely, the origin of appearing

itself must be produced, and such origin without origin is to be sought in difference.

MIMESIS AS DIFFERENCE

Among recent German and French thinkers and especially within the post-structuralist tradition, a reason for the detachment of the connection between mimesis and the correspondence theory of truth has been the so-called linguistic turn in the philosophy of the twentieth century. In Jacques Derrida's philosophy, mimesis operates not only in language but also in a multiplicity of other contexts.

Derrida, like other deconstructionist thinkers, has detached mimesis essentially from representation and from the reproduction of a thing, for example, in another medium. The assumption that mimesis is not based on imitation has two main consequences. First, it leads to the argument that all being is presentation: the reality such as we encounter it in experience cannot be reduced to the imitation of another, more original or ideal truth or reality.[14] Secondly, both modern and postmodern notions of mimesis involve the idea that no-one—neither artist nor anyone else—can reproduce things in the sense that the original thing or the "model" ever could completely correspond to the thing which is brought into existence by the mimetic operation. Although mimesis implicates the production of similarity, it will always mean correspondence in a relative sense only, in the same way as concepts such as sameness, identity, and originality.[15] In Lacoue-Labarthe and Derrida, mimesis as a simple presentation of external reality becomes discarded, for both have strong doubts about the ideology of genuine or authentic original, which mimesis would merely duplicate. Mimesis does not have any fixed character, but rather "a law of impropriety" is the law of mimesis, according to Lacoue-Labarthe.[16]

For Derrida, mimesis does no longer stand for a clearly defined object of thought, which one could make a theory of. Rather, mimesis can be described as a "logic" or a "principle," which forms the condition of both the truth and the subject—these are conditioned by mimesis in the sense that only through mimetic operation a truth or a subject can appear to us. This is to say that mimesis as such does not present itself to us, but only its operation may be shown. Such a notion becomes visible in Derrida's deconstructionist interpretations of Plato and further, of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger.[17]

Mimesis as the production of nonidentity rather than identity is a decisive point of departure for Derrida. According to him, the signs of language do not refer to any transcendental idea that might lie behind them, but signs rather point beyond their own reality.[18] In this argument, Derrida puts into doubt the

core components of Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist theory of language, which posits the differentiation between the signified, that is, the concept or meaning, and the signifier, the expression or interpretation given to the concept.[19] However, Derrida wants to show that what counts as "internal" and "external" to language proves to be problematic, for he perceives the relation between the two components of language, the signifier (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*), inevitably uncertain: it is not clear on what grounds the concept and the object can be said to correspond to each other or not. As he claims against the structuralist view, the immutable signified or the outside of language—in Derrida's terms, its "frame"—cannot be fully distinguished.

Immanuel Kant's idea of "productive imagination" that has the power to create "as it were another nature" has meant an important ground for several contemporary theories of mimesis.[20] Derrida connects Kant's notion of productive imagination to mimesis understood as a linguistic mechanism and a means of producing being in the form of texts that refer to one another.[21] For Derrida, analogy is always language. In Kant, analogy is to be found between the particular, empirical laws of nature in their variety, and their conceptual unity; between determining judgments and reflective judgments. Determining judgment (*bestimmende Urteilskraft*) in its determining role subsumes given particulars under generality that exists as concepts or universals: rules, principles, laws. In Derrida's interpretation, the role of determining judgment is to specify, narrow down, comprehend, and tighten particulars.[22]

Concepts are themselves already given in the reflective judgment (*reflektierende Urteilskraft*) that is responsible for different cognitive tasks with empirical inquiry.[23] In opposition to the determining judgment, the reflective judgment has only the particular at its disposal and must return to generality—for Derrida, "generality" means here a singular historicity. Kant's faculty of judgment is grounded in this principle of analogy between the particular and the universal. Derrida calls their Kantian analogy "economimesis": for him, it is the law of the same and the proper, which always re-forms itself.[24]

For Derrida, even the overall task of philosophy can be called fundamentally mimetic in the sense that the "origin of philosophy is translation or the thesis of translatability"[25]: a thesis that suggests, more or less, the possibility to present things in another form. Within this framework, the particular concern of deconstruction is to show that a thing may have a meaning which is not (quite) itself.[26] The notions of translation, substitution, and reinscription are indistinguishable from deconstruction in the situation where there is a multiplicity of alternative names and open contexts—in Derrida's opinion, the whole of deconstruction "acquires its value only from its inscription in a chain of possible substitutions, in what is too blithely called a context."[27] Yet, there is no single deconstruction but multiple deconstructions: these are singular and each time idiomatic operations, which only have in common

their radical difference. Deconstruction means the process of translation into new signs and contexts, a principle that is opposed to the thought of stable presence or any original, transcendental signified or essence. Such an origin does not exist anywhere outside the system of differences.[28] In all, it can be stated that deconstruction aims at interrogating two things concerning mimesis: first, the classical tradition of theorizing mimesis, often called "mimetology," and secondly, essentialism. Together, these viewpoints largely form the grounds for the metaphysics of presence.[29] In fact, mimesis "precedes" truth in a certain sense; by destabilizing truth in advance, it introduces a desire for *homoiosis*—adequation, similitude, and resemblance—and makes it possible, perhaps, to account for mimesis, "as for everything, that might be its effect, up to and including what is called the subject."[30]

For Derrida, mimesis has both temporal and spatial character—namely, it accounts for how things may appear in another place and at another moment. Difference comes into being in mimesis and is presupposed in mimesis. For this reason, Derrida's interest in the working of mimesis is connected with the production of sense and meaning: how can anything be distinguished or perceived? Because of difference and distinctions, things are neither the same nor indifferent to us.

In a wider sense, Derrida's inquiry of the classical notion of mimesis is essentially based on the critique of the idea of being as presence, which he has considered in a number of contexts. In *Speech and Phenomena*, one of the objectives is the deconstruction of one of the basic arguments of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, namely that phenomena are given in an original intuition or experience. According to this principle, the human consciousness constitutes the meaning of things by means of reduction and is thus able to guarantee the presence of objects and the world and, at the same time, the presence of consciousness to itself.[31] In his interpretation of Husserl's thought, Derrida introduces a general structure of repeatability. This is what makes it possible for him to think of the living present and temporal awareness in Husserl's thought. This structure is also what makes the idea of original presence questionable.

Having Husserl's philosophy as one of his points of departure, Derrida extends his doubt toward the notion of mimesis as imitation or a relation of reference between a model and a reproduction. First, in his inquiry the notion of truth as presence disappears. Truth may manifest itself on the condition of its disappearance, since the place of a stable figure or model is taken by repetition, trace, nonpresence as presence. Finally, the condition of truth shows to be nothing else than its very impossibility:

> Thus, on the one hand, repetition is that without which there would be no truth: the truth of being in the intelligible form of ideality discovers in the *eidos* that

> which can be repeated, being the same, the clear, the stable, the identifiable in its equality with itself. . . . But on the other hand, repetition is the very movement of non-truth: the presence of what gets lost, disperses itself, multiplies itself through mimemes, icons, phantasms, simulacra, etc. Through phenomena, already. And this type of repetition is the possibility of becoming-perceptible-to-the-senses: nonideality. This is on the side of non-philosophy, bad memory, hypomnesis, writing.[32]

Derrida emphasizes here the alleged linguistic origin of all sense; from this, it follows that what we lack is the experience of pure presence. He insists that we may have experience only of what remains, in a nonpresent way, of a differential mark, such a mark being cut off from its alleged production or origin.[33] The difference refers to what precedes the separation between the sensible and the intelligible or the ideal. In this context, Derrida's central notion, *différance*, comes to the fore. It describes what belongs to the separation of the sensible and the intelligible: the constant difference and deferral of meaning. *Différance* is linked to what Derrida calls logocentrism, which he describes as the determination of being as presence. *Différance* announces that there is no referent for presence, that is, foundation or transcendental signified, in the metaphysical realm. Derrida defines *différance* as an unconceptualizable, unperceivable dimension which cannot be returned to any identity, but only to deferral and difference. For him, there is always a gap in place of origin. The origin of presence, namely writing, is not present or absent as such: it is "a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun."[34] Derrida explains that *différance* is the condition for the opposition of presence and absence, although *différance* derives from no category of being, whether present or absent.[35] In fact, *différance* precedes all being.

The concepts of "writing" and "arche-writing" mean repetition that precedes any kind of presence. Repetition and writing consist of fundamental difference and absence. What Derrida calls writing is therefore more original than any instance of presence that could be repeated. This is to say absence and presence do not appear in any symmetrical way: the nonpresence of a thing cannot be reduced to the presence of another thing, that is, to its "now."[36] This means also that absence and presence cannot be interpreted as each other's mimetic opposites.

Différance is nothing ideal or intellectual, but it works as a linear limit which divides itself without establishing itself in any ideal identity. The *traits* and traces of a drawing, for example, illustrate that, since they are neither sensible nor intelligible. Consequently, the *trait* is not to be seen, but it is organized around the blind spots, that is, "'before' all the 'blind spots' that, literally or figuratively, can happen *to* sight, 'before' all the interpretations."[37]

Something thus appears to us from the invisible, out of the *différance* or distance that is neither absent nor present and draws in time or space an order which belongs to neither of these. This means that the origin of things is nothing in itself but only the absence. *Différance* is therefore born as if from impossibility, irreducible to intentional significations, and representations. It is for this reason that we are always faced with the undecidable. The alternatives belong to one another, as one becomes the other; all this takes place in the sphere of the unnameable, beyond any identity and essence. The lack of ideal being or any kind of "origin" thus undermines the possibility of the metaphysical notion of mimesis.

However, Derrida gives a transcendental position to writing, an idea that leads to some radical conclusions: writing suggests that the presence of each "now" moment appears in consciousness in the form of trace. Trace, in turn, refers to the absence or nonpresence of a thing.[38] Because of this, the temporality of consciousness has its basis in what Derrida calls spacing. The life of consciousness, in turn, is grounded in writing which, as a mechanism, means only the formation of temporal and spatial differences and the movement of *différance*, being without ground. Derrida aims at accounting for the space within which the difference between the presence and the present may be thought: "[I]t is the determination of Being as presence or as beingness [*étantité*] that is interrogated by the thought of *différance*."[39] In the place of a present form or figure and its new mode of being as an outcome of mimetic activity, which as a structure is familiar from mimetic theories of art in particular, Derrida states that everything begins with referral. The difference from itself—designated by him as *différance*—exceeds all definitions given to what is pre*sent*, thus giving birth to pre*sence* or the process of being as perpetual coming into presence of things.[40] Representation, in turn, implies the notion of "presencing," which has the sense of allowing-to-presence or making a thing present in another form.

REFLECTIONS OF ANOTHER: THE AMBIGUITY OF MIMESIS

In general, the central point of the poststructuralist debate over mimesis emphasizes separation from both referential representation and the way in which signs refer to themselves. For Derrida, it is no longer possible to reduce mimesis to a closed economy based on circulation or equilibrium of identical acceptations.[41] Each meaning is citational in character: when a word, sentence, or any other kind of thing is removed from its "original" context to a new one, its meaning changes in a way that it does not correspond to the previous one any longer. Consequently, the scope of mimesis comes close to the

notions of referring back (*envoi*), citation and repetition.[42] In the same vein, Derrida questions the assumption concerning the possibility of signification: namely, signification comprehended as a differential mimetic structure of signifier and signified, as well as the possibility of the sign in general.[43] A similar notion has had resonance in several poststructuralist philosophers. For Roland Barthes, any aesthetic practice based on reference and repetition in the sense of imitation is inadequate: according to his semiotic approach, the free play of signs is something that rather undoes the closed economy of mimetic imitation—in Barthes's case, the reproduction of already existing signs.[44]

Another critical point in the contemporary thinking on mimesis is directed at the logic of presentation and representation. According to first Heidegger and later Derrida, among others, this logic is seen to be inherent in the traditional notion of mimesis. Throughout their *œuvre*, Derrida, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe all have displayed doubts toward the traditional logic of presentation and representation, which also has consequences on their understanding of mimesis. For Derrida, no meaning can be present as such: because the full presence of a thing to itself proves to be an impossibility, it is not possible either to give it another figure by means of mimetic operations. The form that a thing may take is equally original with respect to another thing; this is to say that there is no hierarchy between categories of existence in the Platonic sense.

One of the most important concepts which motivate Derrida's philosophy of mimesis is undecidability (*indécidabilité*). Undecidability is similar to *différance* in that it resists the boundaries of philosophy and other discourses. Undecidability can be found in various kinds of differences—in its fundamental ambivalence, it is "nonidentity, nonessence, nonsubstance."[45] In his essay "Plato's Pharmacy," it takes the figure of the *pharmakon*, "medicine," which comes close not only to mimesis but also to Derrida's terms writing and *différance*. Both the *pharmakon* and writing are ambiguous in character, since they can be good as well as bad. Writing can be true and false and it can offer both truth and appearance. Similarly, the *pharmakon* has the double meaning of "remedy" and "poison," for it can be good or evil depending on the context. In Plato, writing works in the same way as the *pharmakon*, for the reason that writing as the *pharmakon*—in this sense, rather poison than remedy for Plato—produces a play of appearances under the cover of which it attempts to pass for truth.[46] For Derrida, the *pharmakon* remains undecidable, and it denotes the difference from the identical to the same. This is what makes writing and the *pharmakon* comparable to mimesis itself: mimesis is, just like writing, a kind of *pharmakon*, because it has a highly ambivalent status in Plato's discourse: "No 'logic,' no 'dialectic,' can consume its reserve even though each must ceaselessly draw on it and seek reassurance through

it," Derrida concludes.[47] In his interpretation, writing can only *mime* memory, knowledge, and truth, for writing is a simulacrum, which constantly disappears in its play.[48] The Platonic mimesis seems to be condemned, just like writing, as bad play, but as soon as play comes into being and into language, it effaces itself as play. Such a play of simulacra engenders all difference, while it itself remains undifferentiated.[49] Thus, the *pharmakon* has the ability to reverse the Platonic hierarchies.

In question here is how the production of truth or the same fails. This is because there are no models to be imitated, since there are only copies of copies, or what Plato calls phantasms. Apart from the *pharmakon* and mimesis, undecidability has various names in Derrida's thinking, which all refer to non-dialectic, ambiguous concepts—or rather, one might say, non-concepts of the "in-between": *différance*, supplement, the hymen, trace, spacing, dissemination, and *grammē*. Through these, he aims at deconstructing what he calls the "logocentric" tradition in Western philosophy.[50] All such (non) concepts, he says, "have a double, contradictory, undecidable value that always derives from their syntax . . . These 'words' admit into their games both contradiction and non-contradiction (and the contradiction and non-contradiction *between* contradiction and non-contradiction)."[51] These are incomplete significations, and it is not possible to decide what the sense of a text, or of any kind of sense, is. Derrida's doubts toward mimesis as imitation are visible in his attitude toward traditional literary criticism, which, according to him, includes the search for univocal hidden meanings and the thematic kernels of texts. Therefore, Derrida sees literary criticism to be "part of what we have called the *ontological* interpretation of mimesis or of metaphysical mimetologism."[52] "Mimetologism" includes, above all, the suppression of nonidentity or difference.

For Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, only mimesis provides the means to transfigure negativity into positivity being through representation. This economy of specular transfiguration that underlies idealist philosophy provides also the basis of Derrida's notion of mimetologism. It means the imitation of the same in a closed system of ultimate higher reconciliation, a system in which what is mimetically represented is the putative unity of the *logos* itself, a *logos* that is identified with the truth.[53] The worry of this deconstructionist critique is thus opposite to the Platonic one, if mimesis does not mean privileging an allegedly "true" original over its duplications. According to Derrida, the Platonic critique is concerned about the belief that the mimetic "double" might itself be taken as self-sufficient, needing no external referent at all.[54]

To show the opposite, namely that literature rather consists in undecidable figures of the in-between, Derrida uses Stéphane Mallarmé's poem "Mimique" (1897) as his example. In this poem, Mallarmé "deconstructs" Plato's *Philebus*, in which Plato speaks of mimesis, truth, and representation.[55]

In the *Philebus*, mimesis is based upon a pair of terms—the "being-present" and its copy. As stated earlier, in the essay "Double Session" Derrida reads "Mimique" as an instance of originary writing, with no reference to what precedes it.[56] Derrida's interpretation of "Mimique" displays the nature of truth in literature: namely, the very process of writing produces space that belongs uniquely to it. Therefore, all causal relations within the literary sphere have their source in the text which, finally, does not imitate anything that is part of the reality outside of the text itself. This amounts to Derrida's belief that every process relating to truth is conventional in literature.[57] In a comparable fashion, Maurice Blanchot has claimed that the language used by Mallarmé is not composed of words but from the movement between their appearance and disappearance.[58]

In Derrida's analyses of the visual arts, the deconstruction of mimesis takes another form. There the aim of his analysis of mimesis is to reveal the logic of nonidentity and dissimilarity between the image and the model, or the representation and the represented. In Derrida's "mimetology," this aim becomes apparent in his doubt of all kinds of categorical pairs. In place of this, he brings the figure of spectrality. The existence of an image is comparable to the return of the specter, for there is a dissimilarity between the "real" thing—such as a pair of peasant shoes in the painting by van Gogh—and the "painted" shoes that do not make a pair.[59] In drawings, there is equally an "abyssal heterogeneity" between the thing drawn and the drawing *trait*. In the eyes of the spectator, the abyss proceeds into the "night," that is, into an appearance where the drawn thing and the *trait* cannot be separated from one another.[60] The drawing and the *trait* as the possibility of the stroke are inseparable and interdependent, and yet separate from each other. A similar structure between inseparable elements can be sought in what Jean-Luc Nancy sees as the logic of mimesis. For him, this logic is suspended between two extremes, those of pure presence (that abolishes mimesis) and similarity (in which mimesis emphasizes the absence of the portrayed model).[61] The portrait—that is at the same time *ritratto*, understood as the withdrawal of the model's presence—brings to light the question of representation or figure. It shows the model by giving him or her an outward expression, but simultaneously it draws out (*tirer*) or extracts (*extraire*) an intimacy or a force that is proper to the model, a force that makes the figure arise in the image.[62] To extract this kind of intimacy *from* its model or object, or what is innermost to it, is to take the picture away from homogeneity and to set it apart. The other, the model, withdraws in showing itself. Nancy sees here the mystery of the portrait revealed: the portrait reveals that it is a matter of mystery in its alterity, but the mystery itself is not revealed, for the portrait does not disclose itself. It remains *l'altro ritratto*, and its otherness will be unknown to us.

The examples above are related to Derrida's understanding of aesthetics, which is founded in his notions of difference and dissymmetry. More distinctly yet, they appear in his theory of photography.[63] Derrida reminds that the word "photography" means originally the "writing of light," as it is composed of traces and produced by technical means. It is the very aspect of trace that challenges the full presence of any photographic instance: photography has the structure of delay, difference, and postponement, which do not mean, however, a return to a more "real" state of affairs that would have preexisted the photographic image itself. The reality of the photograph is the undeniable reality of the perceived image, and nothing else, Derrida claims.[64]

In addition to the "writing of light," for Derrida photography is *skiagraphy*, "shadow writing." This name refers to the imprint of absent present, a present that "*consists* of its own memory, of its own reproduction."[65] The present appears as an archive—as the visible picture—but its presence is only spectral in nature. Thus, the structure of the present becomes divided, as the referent of the photograph is absent: in Derrida's words, "The archive remains and refers to it as to a non-reproducible referent, an irreplaceable place."[66] Photographic images are a matter of traces and time: although we can see the referent in the picture, it is already absent, which makes the photographed always a ghost-like thing.[67] Besides, the different kinds of technical interventions implied in the production of images—such as point of view, calculation of light and exposure—modify the reference itself and diversify it. In photography, the referent is framed and fragmented, and different compositions, recompositions and effects change the relation of reference.[68] In Derrida's deconstructive view, the notion of photograph as the repetition of the singular and of the non-iterable, of what has taken place only once and seems "natural" to us, becomes more complex and even questionable.

The problem of the photographic referent entails the wider question of representation in art. In the traditional sense, the concept of representation springs forth from the sphere of generating and reproducing a thing, such as a figure or an idea, in another medium. In considering the scope of representation, Derrida adheres closely to the anti-mimetic theories of art of the twentieth century. Namely, he doubts if there is, in fact, any possibility of establishing theoretically the mimetic foundation of art. He attempts to show the impossibility of "representational reporting," or the setting into presence of an intelligible reality or form by the means of a sensible reality.[69] The concept of *trait* offers an example of this: it is never repeatable as such. Therefore, it is irreducible to the traditional idea of art as imitation and cannot be enclosed within the scheme of mimesis. The invention of the *trait* does not follow from what is presently visible, nor does it conform to the subject matter or theme of a drawing. Rather, Derrida's argument of the anti-mimeticity of the *trait* relies on the notion that it has the ability to *break*

mimesis by interrupting the scheme of representation. The *trait* implies no straightforward relation to what exists either ideally or in reality.

In Derrida's view, the visible and the invisible are not simple opposites but engendered by one another. According to his description, the blind are tied with those who see, and therefore an "internal duel" breaks out at the very heart of drawing.[70] This "duel" reminds us of *polemos*—instability and ambiguity of significative process—that belongs to the structure of *différance*. However, it seems that signs of a dialectical positioning cannot be avoided here when Derrida employs the rhetoric of the *trait*: it makes us "blindly" aware of what stays out of our sight. It is possible to say so if we suppose that the alleged model of any image cannot be granted by the visible. Here, the structure of language as the reciprocal play of presence and absence is introduced into the sphere of the visual as well, where presence and absence are not exclusive of one another.

NOTES

1. Apart from the theories treated in this chapter, the theme of mimesis has been of unsurpassable significance to several philosophers of the twentieth century, for example, Walter Benjamin, Paul Ricœur and René Girard.
2. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*.
3. Plato, for example, *Republic*, 595a–614b.
4. See Martin Jay, "Mimesis and Mimetology," in *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997), 30.
5. Aristotle, *Poetics*, § 4, 1448b7–8.
6. Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 8, 199a15–19.
7. George Whalley, "On Translating *Poetics*," in *Aristotle's* Poetics (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1997), 15–16; Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 214 (*L'imitation des modernes: Typographies II*, Paris: Galilée, 1985, 46).
8. Mihai Spariosu, "Editor's Introduction," in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: An Interdisciplinary Approach. Volume 1: The Literary and Philosophical Debate*, ed. Mihai Spariosu (Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1984), i–xxix; Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture—Art—Society*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 312–315.
9. See Samuel IJsseling, *Mimesis: On Appearing and Being*, trans. Hester IJsseling and Jeffrey Bloechl (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1997/1990).
10. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1011b25; Plato, *Sophist* 263b, *Cratylus* 385b2. See also Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, for example, 69–70 ("Typographie," 196–197).
11. IJsseling, *Mimesis*, 16. For Derrida's interpretation of the concepts of *homoiosis* and *adaequatio* in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, see *The Truth in Painting*, 47–48 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 55–56) and "Economimesis."
12. See Jay, "Mimesis and Mimetology," 29–30.

13. See, for example, Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 3–27 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 3–29).

14. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche I* (Neske: Pfullingen, 1961), 168–169. Heidegger uses the term *Nachahmung* for "representation." See also Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 215 (*L'imitation des modernes*, 45–46).

15. Arne Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 3.

16. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 258–259 (*L'imitation des modernes*, 27).

17. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 61–172, 173–285; also Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 43–138, 139–207.

18. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 307–330 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 365–393) ("Signature Event Context").

19. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Columbia UP, 2011).

20. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §§ 46–47, 49.

21. Derrida, "Economimesis," esp. 13 ("Économimesis," 74).

22. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 51–52 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 59–60).

23. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Introduction, IV and V. In Kant, reflective judgments account for two specific kinds of judgments, namely aesthetic and teleological. See also Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 117–118 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 134–135).

24. See Trottein, "Pour une esthétique des *parerga*," 250.

25. Jacques Derrida et al., "Roundtable on Translation," trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation—Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*, ed. Christie McDonald (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 120.

26. Richter, "Between Translation and Invention," ix.

27. Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," trans. David Wood and Andrew Benjamin, in *Derrida and Différance*, eds. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Warwick: Parousia, 1985), 4–5 (*Psyché*, 392: "Lettre à un ami japonais").

28. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 279–281 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 411–413). See also Richter, "Between Translation and Invention," xiv–xv.

29. Cf. Jay Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 147.

30. Jacques Derrida, "Introduction: Desistance," in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*: *Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, edited by Christopher Fynsk (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998), 27.

31. Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)*, trans. J. Brough, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), no. 40, 54; cf. Marc Goldschmit, *Jacques Derrida, une introduction* (Paris: Pocket, 2003), 14.

32. Derrida, Jacques, *Dissemination*, 168–169 (*La dissémination*, 195).

33. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 318 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 378).

34. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 295 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 430).

35. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 143 (*De la grammatologie*, 206).

36. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 65–66 (*La voix et le phénomène*, 73).

37. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 55 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 59).

38. See Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 83–87, 95–96 (*La Voix et le phénomène*, 92–97, 107–108).

39. Derrida, *The Margins of Philosophy*, 21 (*Marges de la philosophie*, 22).

40. The difference between presentation and representation evokes the question of the limits of representation, of what is unrepresented or unpresentable. In his interpretation, Derrida relies on the Hegelian view on representation: he writes that the *Vorstellung* marks the limit which is to be sublated. It retains the structure of *already* and *not yet*, still staying in subjective unilaterality. In Derrida's opinion, the unrepresentable is not so much that which one is unable to represent, but that which is *not allowed* to be represented. This is where the still alien pre-ontological structure may be sought. For Hegel, the *Vorstellung* is a mediation between the unfree and the free intellect, that is, thought. According to Heidegger's interpretation, the form of the passage between the modes of intellect, the *Aufhebung* of representation, still belongs to the epoch of representation. Jacques Derrida, "Sending: On Representation," trans. Peter and Mary Ann Caws, *Social Research* 49, no. 2 (1982): 313 ("Envoi," in *Psyché*, 124, 129).

41. Derrida, "Economimesis," 4 ("Économimesis," 59).

42. Derrida, "Sending."

43. See Spariosu, "Mimesis and Contemporary French Theory," 75.

44. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 145.

45. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 70 (*La dissémination*, 79).

46. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 268c, 274e–275b; Derrida, *Dissemination*, 103 (*La dissémination*, 117).

47. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 139 (*La dissémination*, 160).

48. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 156–157, 193 (*La dissémination*, 180–181, 220).

49. See Spariosu, "Mimesis and Contemporary French Theory," 66.

50. See Derrida, *Positions*, 49 (Fr. *Positions*, 67).

51. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 221 (*La dissémination*, 250).

52. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 275–276 (*La dissémination*, 245).

53. Derrida, *Dissemination* 183 (*La dissémination*, 208–209). See also Jay, "Mimesis and Mimetology," 38.

54. Jay, "Mimesis and Mimetology," 30.

55. In Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1897), 186–189. The first version of "Mimique" was published in 1886.

56. For this interpretation, see Timothy Clark, "Being in Mime: Heidegger and Derrida on the Ontology of Literary Language," *MLN* 101, no. 5 (December 1986): 1003–1021.

57. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 207–210 (*La Dissémination*, 234–237).

58. Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford : Stanford UP, 2003), 240–241 (*Le livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959, 320).

59. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 377 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 431).

60. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 45 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 50).

61. Nancy, *Portrait*, 48 ("The Other Portrait"; *L'Autre portrait*, 17).

62. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 4 (*Au fond des images*, 16). The root word for *tirer* and its derivatives is the Latin *trahere*. The withdrawal of the model, Nancy remarks, gives us to see what Jean-Christophe Bailly calls the "absolute of the image." Bailly, *Le Champ mimétique*, 45: "cet absolu de l'image qu'est le portrait." Cit. Nancy, *Portrait*, 49 (*L'Autre portrait*, 18).

63. See also Nathalie Roelens, "Les chaussures de van Gogh, suite," in *Jacques Derrida et l'esthétique*, ed. Nathalie Roelens (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), 98–99.

64. Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes*, 25–26, 31; "Right of Inspection," 24–25, 90 ("Une lecture de *Droit de regards*," iii, xlvi).

65. Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 1–2.

66. Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 3.

67. Derrida, "Une lecture de *Droit de regards*," xlvi–xlvii.

68. Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 7–9.

69. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 68–69, 122 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 69–74, 123).

70. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 57 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 61).

Chapter 7

The Deconstruction of the Image

The image is one of the overarching themes in philosophy of art and contemporary visual studies, but like figure, it extends outside of the scope of mere visuality. In poststructuralist thinking, the concept of the image appears in various contexts. Apart from visual representations such as pictures, the image is linked with the larger themes of how being appears to us and how we conceive of the world. Is it possible to present the world in the form of image conceived as totality, as a coherent work?

In his essay "The Age of the World Picture," Martin Heidegger deems the metaphysical tendency an objectifying way of thinking.[1] It means to understand being in terms of constant presence and of the subject who brings something before itself. What Heidegger calls the metaphysics of presence includes the idea the being presents itself as an "image," an object for awareness. However, he sees a threat in understanding being as presence *for* this mode of representation.

In more recent thinking, Heidegger's view of the modern world becoming a mere object undoubtedly bears some similarity with Guy Debord's thinking of the "spectacle" or Jean Baudrillard's "simulacra," which point to a notion of reality that appears as images of itself. For Debord, the concept of the spectacle reflects the development in which authentic social life has been replaced by its mediated representation that, as commodity, supplants genuine activity, knowledge, and critical thought. Thus, spectacle comes to mean the growth of capital that becomes an image after exceeding a certain threshold.[2] Like Heidegger's "world picture," the spectacle as appearance makes people conceive of life as a never-ending presence, thus obfuscating the dimensions of past and future. The anti-idealistic, anti-essential, and anti-mimetic inclination is visible in different forms also in, for example, Jean-François Lyotard's interpretation of the Kantian sublime, Jean-Luc Nancy's,

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's, and Georges Didi-Huberman's critique of the mimetic concepts of representation and logocentrism.[3]

As for Derrida, one of his aims is to think of the "image," as well as the adjacent "work," beyond the scheme of representation. This means the deconstruction of the idea of completion, self-presence of meaning, and immediacy of the depicted object that he sees to be implied in these concepts historically. In Derrida, the image is not restricted to the visual arts only, but also refers to literature and to the concept of mimesis.

In the context of art, Derrida does not necessarily give an unambiguous definition of the concept of the image. This makes it somewhat complex to get a hold of the scope of the image; instead, Derrida's reader may often refer to what the deconstructive image is *not* rather than what it positively is. What most characterizes his notion of the image is that it is not a representation of a thing: in Derrida, the image neither points to a symbolic illusion nor is an instance of mimesis.[4] However, the theme of image does not form any consistent discussion in his philosophy, but rather appears in the context of other concepts, such as the *parergon*, the trace and the *trait* and vision.

In his deconstruction of image, Derrida calls into question the traditional assumption of its coherence. The deconstructive idea that he brings instead puts into doubt the notions of the image as either imitation or a representation of a thing in another medium, a reproduction of a model, a picture, or an object, or that the image would be understood exclusively as a visual phenomenon. Derrida's critique of the idealism underpinning the concept of representation is targeted at the notion that ideas are primary, while non-ideas, such as physical and material things, are secondary. According to the deconstructive idea, the image does not exist to illustrate an idea or to capture reality in any consistent way—rather, the image can act upon reality and construct an idea. Consequently, the meanings of the image are multiple: the range of the image can be anything from a work of art to a composition, from a painting, photograph, or film frame to a memory or an after-image.[5]

As a concept, the poststructuralist "image" resembles the "work" in that they extend beyond all positive meanings. For Derrida, to call something "work" or "image" is to consider at once the conditions and limitations of what has previously been conceived of as work or image. For him, like for Roland Barthes, the concepts of image and work are similar in that they are fundamentally without identity. Namely, the image and the work only appear on the limit between coherence and losing their sense of totality as concepts. By becoming thus workless, they are continuously undone: what manifests itself as an image appears to us only at the verge of its breaking apart as a conceptual meaningful entity. Instead of maintaining the discursive coherence, Derrida argues, the image is dispersed in diverse contexts and references, such as citations or after-images produced in memory and other

compositions: rather than being a form of unambiguous presence, the image exists as traces of things that are either not yet or no longer there, in other words, available in the image itself.

The task of framing and limiting the scope of the image proves complex. In Derrida, images are neither "absolute speech," nor are they "pure silence"; images invite words to account for them as much as words attract images.[6] On such grounds, the relation between the word and the image is not symmetrical or dialectic. Because the image never argues anything in the way that propositional language does, images cannot be reducible to mere illustrations of arguments or theories either.[7] Therefore, there is a fundamental breach between what art appears to show or communicate to us and what we literally observe in the work.

In various theories of art history, the image refers to numerous concepts: among them are picture, perception, visualization, perspective, and other pictorial elements such as depth, spatial recognition, and color.[8] The essential art historical question concerns, then, how scenes of the world may be replaced by a flat pigmented surface that will provide the eye with a more or less identical optic pattern.[9] In cognitive science and psychology, in turn, the concept of image refers to how the mind works and creates representations.[10] For art historian Ernst Gombrich, who was inspired by these sciences, the image refers to a mental representation, both in the making and recognizing of pictures.[11] To ask how representations are created requires studying the social conventions as to how things are represented in art. It also means inquiring whether conventions of making works of art are learned from the experience from existing representations or whether the conventions are innate rather than acquired.[12]

The viewpoints above show that many theories of image derive from an empirical notion of perception and one of their important concerns is the equivalence between the things of the world or the mental representation and the pictorial image. In other words, if the image is deemed as objectively informative, we may inquire how accurately the picture reproduces the traits of the model, and whether the truth of the image lies in the correspondence between the iconic result and the perception of the original.[13] Clearly, to require such extrinsic conformity is to say that this notion is grounded either in the mimetic notion of art or in the intrinsic expressivity of the image. In the latter case, the reality of the contents is based on the impression produced by the work of art, and not only on the apparent similarity between the representation and the world.[14] The third possibility is that the image acts upon the spectator on a psychological level by affecting him or her emotionally and by stimulating his or her imagination and other psychological faculties. Images of this kind can be described to be fictively true, as their coherence is mainly that of the image itself.[15]

All the views mentioned above refer to a conception according to which the image would be a transparent medium that represents the visual world through visual properties and functions as a "visual prosthesis."[16] The idea that the image offers an access to the representation of reality corresponds, at least partly, with a conception that originates from the age of Renaissance, namely that the work of art would lend itself as a window into another world. In *On Painting*, the Renaissance painter Leon Battista Alberti gives an influential formulation to this notion: "First of all, I trace as large a quadrangle as I wish, with right angles, on the surface to be painted; in this place, it [the rectangular quadrangle] certainly functions for me as an open window through which the *historia* is observed."[17]

Rather than finding truth in *a posteriori* knowledge on art derived from sensory experience, Derrida's approach is closer to what Georges Didi-Huberman terms as the "poetics of the image."[18] Didi-Huberman discovers such poetics already in the writings of the poet Paul Claudel and philosophers such as Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, for whom the focus is on the "poetic" internal aspect of the image that is invisible and even vulnerable, and yet not entirely unspeakable. A related disparity between the visible and the invisible or the expressible and the inexpressible is central to Derrida, who states that there is something in images, like in language, that does not lend itself to be translated into speech; however, this difficulty of translation produces even more words. In principle, words all present themselves as insufficient, and, at the same time, too much to render the painting or drawing into the language of reason. The concept of the image exemplifies this problem from one angle in that it provides a vivid account of the importance of art in philosophy: the undecidable is the breach between sensuous experience and the way of approaching metaphysical questions of reality.

SELF-(IN)SUFFICIENCY: IMAGE AND AUTONOMY

In Derrida, the autonomy of the image refers to the notion that it does not represent any idea or conceptual meaning that would lie outside of it. The image merely shows itself as an image. This is to say that the truth of the work of art goes beyond any meaningful discourse. The image is nevertheless able to present a sense or truth, but not an idea that would be available anywhere before. The truth is that of the image's own sense, which, however, is detached and independent from any logic of signification or discursive information. In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida develops the thought that the painting does not represent the truth of itself, while it *presents* it without defining the boundaries of the image in any definite manner, as this would only result in determining its signification and renouncing from its openness.[19]

That for Derrida the image is not representation, it follows from this that the image as he conceives of it is not a sensuous representation of an idea or a concept in the manner Hegel has suggested. For Hegel, the "content of art is the Idea, while its form is the configuration of sensuous material."[20] Derrida denies Hegel's view; to him, the image is not a symbol of another thing that would reside outside it either. In this, he agrees with Heidegger, for whom the work of art is more than its "thingly element." The artistic nature of the work is constituted by something else than the mere thing, but to call this "something" an allegory or a symbol would be too restrictive for Heidegger: namely that the work would manifest something other than what appears in it.[21] According to Derrida, in Heidegger "representation" conveys the meaning of letting or making a thing come into presence, in which the sense of repetition and of return to the same is involved. This is how representation points at the duplication of presence when it is reproduced as an effigy, sign, or symbol and something is brought in its place.[22] If the image were determined as representation, it would give it the identity of a mere reproduction of the same. This would make the image a vehicle of translation of a definite meaning in another medium. Derrida, however, is against this: for him the image is overdetermined by meaning in that the work exceeds the simple repetition and reproduction of an ideal content. As a result, it may be suggested that the image resembles his concept of the work of art, also in the sense that thing presented by the image always overflows what the image is "about," namely its content or the intention behind the presentation.

Unlike several other theorists of the image, Derrida's analysis of the image is thus not grounded in the mimetic model of representation, nor is the image a transparent "picture" that would open like a window to another world. Rather, for Derrida the image can be described as a site of differing. Only because they refer to each other and to other images of the world, they may have a meaning for the spectator. Although the image is not a vehicle for representing another thing, repetition and reproduction thus belong to the nature of images.

Being sites of difference, images produce other images by taking visual elements, ideas and motifs from other images and the reality that surrounds them. However, even if the image is related to other images and things, at the same time it possesses some degree of autonomy in Derrida. Its autonomy must nonetheless be understood in a specific sense. Insofar as the image has a capability of presenting things, it is real and material. From this follows that one may see the image as self-present and self-enclosed: "every images relates to [*vaut pour*] itself," and "images are without reference," Derrida states.[23] On such grounds, the position of the image appears to be double: it is related to other images, while at the same time it is autonomous. The film image provides one of Derrida's examples of the mutual reference and autonomy:

each frame of the film is autonomous, as it can be examined independently of other frames. However, the idea of autonomy becomes more complicated if the image is seen as dependent on the acts of reproduction—that is, on the ways that creative imagination "reproduces" images mimetically and refers to other images and other things. This makes the image both autonomous and simultaneously dependent on other images and their reproducibility.

From this perspective, the origin of the production of images cannot be an abstract idea that the resulting painting, drawing, or film frame would simply imitate. If the origin of the image is itself neither a concrete object nor an abstract idea and is, thus, without origin, how does the image exist? Despite the lack of mimetic origin, Derrida holds that the image does have another kind of origin, namely material foundation: it is the reality of other images. Such reality can be described as facticity, namely the fact that other images exist. Its ground is abysmal and placed in the existence of a plurality of other images, among which the differences multiply constantly. What is this facticity like, if it is itself without ground, and never one and unified?

In this context, multiplication and reproduction are related with the notion that images generate other images. An image is a presentation that is composed of a network of differential *traits* and traces. Within the image, those *traits* are related with each other, so that the image presents the trace of its own trace, thereby distinguishing itself from other things when it presents its own being as an image. For Derrida, this is the only truth that the image may possess, a "truthless truth," as brought out in *The Truth in Painting*. This notion bears a resemblance to Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of the autonomous image that is defined by its being distinctive. In Nancy's words, the image is "real presence" in the sense of "sacred intimacy."[24] With this, he suggests that in the image there is an inner force that makes it distinct from everything else, so that the image is not reducible to discursive language or the chains of signification.

Apart from its affinity with Nancy's ideas, Derrida's notion of the image is largely comparable to Georges Didi-Huberman's critique. For Didi-Huberman, the image does not indicate either imagery, reproduction, iconography, nor does the image even have a "figurative" aspect.[25] At stake in the image is rather a figure that is only becoming figure (*figure figurante*)—in other words, the process of becoming. This is, more than anything, an act: something on the surface of colors and volumes becomes visible in front of us. This is something that Maurice Merleau-Ponty has referred to as the duplicity that belongs to drawing, painting, and the image alike: the image is not a copy of the world, but the image belongs to both inside and outside of experience, while it does not belong to either of them entirely. The experience of the image must then be described as the duplicity of the feeling (*le sentir*).[26]

For Didi-Huberman, the structure of the image is open, to begin with, "shred apart, affected and ruined" in every context.[27] Being open-ended, images are neither purely rational in character nor entirely empirical, and such opposition does not even apply to them. As a consequence, the force behind images is in Didi-Huberman the work of the negative, which "hollows out both the visible, or the order of representation, and wounds the legible, or the order of signification."[28] In Didi-Huberman, as in Derrida, the notion of the image that does not belong to the order of representation allows it a place beyond oppositions and hierarchies. Its function is rather to exceed any given opposition due to the *materia informis* that emerges on the form, presentation that emerges in representation, opacity that emerges in transparency and the visual (*le visual*) that shows in the visible.[29]

Autonomy, in the meaning of the image's presence to itself, marks indeed a crucial question in Derrida's theory of the image. The dual position of autonomy and its lack in the image brings out the ambiguous position of the image. Although autonomous, the image immediately calls for words: the visual does not appeal only to the eye but engenders at once a need for verbal explication.[30] By stating so, Derrida deconstructs the notion of the image as a self-present, self-enclosed object. All images call forth words, but a combination of images does this even more. Conversely, also words contain images, and the combinations of words do not remain merely within the boundaries of the linguistic, but they make images emerge in the viewer's mind. This idea makes the image a form of writing for Derrida, but in a film, for example, also the production and montage of images are writing. As he explains in an interview, cuts of a film make singular images and the differences between them multiply, and the images become images of images: images to the second power.[31] When an image produces other images, it adopts visual elements, ideas, and subject matters from other images and other things.

This intertextual character at the heart of images echoes with the question of sonorous or echographic effect that in Derrida's analyses exists between images, for example, in Colette Deblé's paintings or the photographs in Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*.[32] Similarly, a painting may express a cry or it may resonate silence, an untranslatable "silencing" (*un "se taire"*).[33] This is to say that the image is not limited to producing solely new images, but also other areas, either aesthetic or inaesthetic, sensuous or belonging to the realm of reflection.

On several occasions, Derrida's thought of the proliferating points of difference in images and elsewhere in art bears resemblance to Jean-Luc Nancy's ontological idea of art.[34] According to Nancy, art is heterogeneous from the start: the origin of art is not only one, but it is originally divided or zoned according to the senses and between different arts. The idea of art's heterogeneous origin includes that art always emerges in difference. At the

same time, he claims that the division of arts and that of senses cannot be identified, for art dislocates the alleged sensuous difference. Thus, for Nancy, what we call "art" always exists in multiplicity, that is, in the singular arts, in the singular artistic genres and, finally, in singular works and their differential *traits*. As he suggests, the origin of art is therefore without foundation in the sense that only the separation of the senses and the plurality of different arts form its groundless ground. Conversely, we may think here about *one* art in its dissolution. Nancy and Derrida alike endorse the idea that the origin of art is itself without origin, and thus it is foundationless. Consequently, being understood as difference means the sole point of departure for their theory of art.

In addition to Derrida's notion that images call for words, every word is at the same time pregnant with images, and a combination of words is even more so. Even if image and language are not reducible to each other, Derrida argues nevertheless that they are similar because the image is a form of open textuality and is essentially writing.[35] Like writing, the image is composed of traces and *traits*—marks, inscriptions, or signs—that are singular and inimitable in their context of appearance. Yet, their presence to themselves is not absolute in the sense that it is possible to repeat a *trait* endlessly, but not as exactly the same; therefore, the image fully exists only here and now, in the present tense.[36] Peter Brunette and David Wills have called this Derridean condition of simultaneous autonomy and its lack "the self-(in)sufficiency of the image."[37] As Brunette and Wills point out, in film self-presence is always called into question—the spectator is pulled out of the fullness of the image on the screen by suddenly constructing alternative loci of representation, and thus other frames. In this, a confrontation takes place between given images and the context that exceeds them.[38] As it appears, the presence of the image arises from difference: it is like an entanglement of a plurality of voices that already echo another voice at the moment of their spelling out or when the image becomes manifest by means that are predominantly, but never purely, visual. As Derrida points out, the expression of each artist affirms that words inhabit images, and the invisible determines their logic: that is, the interruption, the ellipsis, the whole zone of invisibility that "presses on the visible."[39]

The resonance between the different kinds of image become visible in the film *D'ailleurs, Derrida*—in English, *Derrida's Elsewhere*, directed by Safaa Fathy in 1999. *D'ailleurs, Derrida* is primarily a documentary about Derrida's philosophical work, but also autobiographical aspects are entwined in the film, such as memories and places that have been of importance to him in the past. In the film two genres, documentary and fiction, fuse into one another, thus breaking the boundaries between these categories. As a result, the film shows itself to the spectator, without being identifiable to either genre.[40]

In discussing the film, Derrida argues that the director has subjected word to image, so that words are *like* images in the film. They are generated by the necessity of rhythm, of sequences and the continuity of images, so that everything appears as structured according to the "law of the image," either visual or musical. Derrida goes as far as to identify the word and the image in the film—while he does not say that they would be reducible to each other, they work in the same manner.[41] The image works here in the way of *ecphrasis*, as the film incessantly refers to other arts that border on it.[42] Although in the film words act like images, Derrida nevertheless underlines that there always exists a cut (*coupure*) or montage between them; however, this cut can be done in innumerable ways.[43] As it seems, the cut is thus what cannot be made an image of: it is similar to the working of difference that we can never conceptualize or make a figure of. The difference *shows*, although it cannot be pronounced verbally; the difference exposes absence and withdrawal of images and words, as well as the need for more words and images.

As this example makes evident, Derrida is seeking the image outside of the figure, and, at the same time, outside of identity and essence, which would only amount to a return to the thought of totality.[44] Such incompleteness makes the image fundamentally finite, never a "total image" or a complete picture, but only an aspect of the world. Thus, it resembles a Romantic fragment in that it is never fully autonomous but exists in a context—of the world, other images and language. His deconstruction of the image is similar to what happens to the concept of work in *Dissemination*, where he examines critically the belief in the self-presentation of meaning and its idealistic unity, suggesting instead the "undoing" and "unworking" of every work and the multiplicity of its meanings. This is what the film's French title, *D'ailleurs, Derrida*, also refers to: that any meaning and identity, Derrida's personal identity included, are dislocated and absent to themselves. In their place there is being that is understood as a trace that is at once separated from its origin, so that something remains of it in the trace.[45] Contrary to the notion of image as a clearly defined representation, Derrida resists the thinking of the image as an object.

BETWEEN THE FRAME AND THE LOST COHERENCE: THE GROUNDLESS IMAGE

Derrida's theory of the image is grounded in the conception that a signification of the image is never present to itself. This is obvious already in *The Truth in Painting*, where his argument of the *parergon* aims to subvert the coherence of the image that means yet another form of self-presence in the Kantian discourse.[46] The discussion around the *parergon* focuses

on the frame that collapses to divide diagonally the internal coherence of whatever resides within that frame, bringing about what is referred to.[47] In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant's aim is to describe what constitutes the basis of the aesthetic judgment, while he is unable to define the boundaries of the object of his theory. From the viewpoint of the image, it is possible to say that Kant's idea of its *parergon* becomes visible against the notions of integrity and coherence and the separation between the inside from outside in the image. Here, their relation resembles what Derrida describes as a "crisscross double invagination"—an erasure that is also a rewriting as *différance*.[48]

As Peter Brunette and David Wills have remarked, in Derrida the meaning of the image can never be contained within its borders but resides on "another level": the image repeats the metaphysical operation that governs the sense of the word.[49] Namely, they suggest that Derrida assumes both the image and the word to be expendable materialities whose real meaning resides elsewhere. Such a notion means detachment from the common idea, common before the age of realism, that the image would operate as a symbolic representation like the word. As Brunette and Wills point out, the transparency and self-evidence of the image was not called into question until the emergence of sign theory or semiology, which has had evidently a crucial influence on Derrida's ideas of both language and the image. Only the advent of photography offered a signifier, the signified of which appeared to be immediately accessible—in photography, meaning is "almost" self-present; a poetic word that refers to itself offers the poetic model of self-reflexivity.[50]

This notion of the poetic nature of the image is comparable to Roland Barthes's insight. For him, the still image is not a sample or an idea that supposes a sort of homogeneous, statistical nature of the film elements, but a quotation, for the reason that we know how much importance presently accrues to the concept of quotation in the theory of the text. The still is therefore at once parodic and disseminatory.[51] This makes photograph part of an unending chain of textuality.

The fundamental unicity and singularity of the image is further enlightened by a specific point of view into its autonomy, namely the ground, of which Derrida uses alternately the adjacent terms of *le support*, *la substance*, and *le subjectile*. These, in turn, refer to the *thesis*, namely, "what is posited underneath; a position, a place" (*ce qu'on pose dessous*; *une position, une mise*), and also to the "hypothesis" and the "supposition"—what lies underneath, in the ground, what comes from the ground (*une hypothèse*, *une supposition: ce qu'on avance en le posant, en le mettant, par en dessous, dessous, dans le dessous*).[52] The concept of the ground is here connected to the frame, but, as Derrida claims, both the frame (*cadre*, *parergon*) and the ground are often ignored, forgotten, and denied.[53]

What is common to the frame and the ground is their inseparability from the image and its figures. The inseparation is formed by the singular combination of the work and the ground from which the image emerges, or by the frame that surrounds the image. The very combination of these elements provides the uniqueness of each work of art, for each combination is irreplaceable and can never be reproduced as the same again. The ground is thus like the material corpus (*corps*) of the work, and never pure signification or *logos*. It can be said that the corpus of the work resists the separation between the ground and the surface, namely form, representation, *trait*, or color.[54] At the same time, the work resists being separated into the visible and the linguistic elements. Instead, the ground and the figure are one, as the figure is attached directly to the ground; the form of the image is inscribed on the material support, something that Derrida characterizes as a contact without interval.

The question of the ground has a certain relevance for Derrida's discussion of the autonomy of the image. That he considers each image singular is to say that it distinguishes itself from everything else, a notion that makes the image autonomous. The relation between the support and the surface is always singular: the idea in the artist's mind is never merely an idea, but in art, it necessarily has a ground, material like wood, stone, metal, canvas or paper, or the frame, *parergon*, that supports it. In this respect, the ground or support of the image provides the ground of its unique singularity: the ground forms part of what is "unique, and thus rare" in a work of art or an image.[55] But what is it, exactly, that makes it rare? As Derrida answers, the rarity belongs to the relation between the support and the surface—in other words, the materiality and the "expression" that the artist has given to it by working the material. This makes the work irreducible to any concept: it cannot be simply reproduced in another medium.

Such idea of inseparability of the surface and the ground of the work resonates with Derrida's thinking of touch from a specific viewpoint. For him, there is no touching without a difference to the touched thing; contact takes place nowhere but in an interval. In the same way, the contact between the two corpora of the image—the figure and the ground—is necessarily one of *tact*: despite their inseparability and the lack of distance, they do not lose their distinctness and thus do not become one, or the same.[56] What follows from this is that the image does not touch the ground to neutralize, to destroy, or to replace it. In fact, the inseparability of the image and the ground turns out double: first, because of the substance of the support or the subjectile and its character of being beneath (*la sous-jacence de ce qui est dessous*)—and second, because the form of the work is above its support (*le dessus de la forme*): "the surface, the volume, the representation, the trait, the color, and the like."[57] Thus, the surface and the foundation are not mutually replaceable: they occupy their place as if the work of art were a single event or a

happening. Derrida's argument is now that all that is material in the work of art is irreducible to anything conceptual, but it has its singular, inimitable existence as a situation, right where it is. Therefore, no general "idea" may replace one presentation or image with another, since every presentation is attached to its own material ground—and yet necessarily maintains a distance to it, without fusing into the support.

The support or the ground proves to be something impenetrable and inaccessible. In this, it resembles the "work-material" defined by Heidegger: "stone, wood, metal, color, language, tone"—the "thingly character" of the work.[58] Through it, the work sets forth "a world," that is, its meaning in a particular historical situation. Something comes into the Open of the work's world from the materiality of the work, like the massiveness of stone and the hardness and luster of metal—this is what Heidegger calls "earth." In this opening, the work presents itself to the spectator and is revealed according to its qualities: "The rock comes to bear and rest and so first becomes rock; metals come to glitter and shimmer, colors to glow, tones to sing, the word to speak."[59] As Andrea Potestà has concluded, Derrida's theory of the ground signals a similar presence-absence of sense as in Heidegger's division between earth and world.[60] The ground of the work, or its materiality, lets itself be seen as the obscurity of an impenetrable thing. Yet, the ground unfolds only in difference as through difference: in endless possibilities, or according to the "untouchable line between coincidence and difference."[61] As a result, the vision dislocates itself and the sense wanders, making the ground an "infigurable figurable" and thus indeterminable and without any concept. The indefinable difference that is the "essence" of the ground may be seen although it cannot be expressed by words—in the ground, absence is exposed absence, namely absence of signification or any abstract idea. What remains is the materiality of the image.

THE HETEROGENEITY OF THE IMAGE

Above, the emphasis has been on the relation between the image and what frames and grounds it: how the relation of the image to its outside is formed and conditioned and how it becomes deconstructed in Derrida's hands. As suggested, the image is autonomous for him, as it distinguishes itself as image among the things of the world; at the same time, the image lacks autonomy, as it is inseparable from the material and linguistic contexts of the world. The question on relation of the image to its outside is based on the idea that the image is not self-enclosed and framed by its concept or essence, but the frames that differentiate what is internal and what is external to the image are constantly experimented with and redefined. The image is also open in

another sense: it affects the spectator and its environment by generating ideas that have existed nowhere before.

Even in its relative autonomy, the image is internally heterogeneous in Derrida's discussion. It is graphic as well as pictorial, and not a subject to a single mode of signification—the image can be summarized as effects of the signature, the rebus, and the hieroglyph, all means by which writing is read upon, or into, the image.[62] Derrida describes the image as an "articulation of almost contradictory things," an articulation of antinomies, of which the film as an art of cutting and montage provides an example.[63] The elements of the image are always heterogeneous, as the image contains elements—colors, traits, media, and visual and linguistic references—that do not "naturally" belong together. The cut between image and word takes place in innumerable ways.[64] Derrida's most important perspective into the inner heterogeneity of the image is to understand the image as the site for producing difference.

Being a locus of differences, the image expands endlessly toward its outside. A crucial question is thus how the image holds together, and if so, on what conditions it can keep a level of integrity, however relative it may be. Considering that the image is intrinsically heterogeneous in that it comprises things that do not belong together naturally, Derrida's notion of image differs remarkably from the concept of the image and the work of art for which several recent philosophers have sought a unified foundation. For example, Monroe C. Beardsley has given three criteria for the work of art, namely unity, complexity, and intensity. These are also the evaluative properties of art; especially "unity" means for Beardsley that the work of art seems to require nothing external and all the elements of the work fit together.[65] This notion is contrary to Derrida's, who searches the image in heterogeneity and lack of essence. His aim is to seek the network between the world and the image, which happens by deconstructing the elements of the image. This task appears even more demanding if we suppose that the reality is image in itself or even an infinite number of images.[66] Derrida's concept of the image, like the work of art, thus shows to be boundless rather than unified and homogeneous, and the indefinable contexts are finally the only frames of the image. Such image is not a totality but more like a fragment that is always related to its outside.

Such model of articulation presents both verbal and nonverbal materials. Gregory Ulmer has called it the "picto-ideo-phonographic" writing or inscriptions.[67] Ulmer terms Derrida's project the program of "applied grammatology," which manifests a "graphic rhetoric," or writing that is ideographic and phonetic at the same time. For Ulmer, Derrida hence elaborates a tripartite script in exposing the picto-ideo-phonographic writing, in which every presentation includes, not only the commentator's discourse and the subject matter—in a word, the phonetic level—but also ideo- and pictographic elements,

such as connotation and allegory. Examples interpolated into the discourse represent the ideographic element, while "found" pictorial material, such as the verbal "translations" of works of art in *The Truth in Painting* or the use of a particular postcard from the Bodleian Library in Oxford in Derrida's *Post Card* represent the pictographic element.[68] According to Ulmer, this applied grammatology exemplifies the grafting of visual items to texts rather than deconstructing philosophical tradition.

Ulmer wishes to highlight Derrida's effort to show that the phonetic and nonphonetic elements of writing interact everywhere in communication. In cases where words are inserted into images, it is impossible to totalize the border of the narrative: the frames are always framed in this "parergonal logic," according to which truth is not adequation, but it includes a fictional element: truth declares itself through fiction.[69] The logic of the frame or the *parergon* therefore undoes the conceptual closure, as Ulmer shows with his examples of Valerio Adami's drawings related to Derrida's book *Glas* and Derrida's analyses of Adami's and Gérard Titus-Carmel's works in *The Truth in Painting*.[70]

As Derrida points out, Titus-Carmel's 127 drawings of the mahogany box are entirely fictional in the sense that they "will have remained without example" and "without precedent" in the series of works.[71] Although Derrida writes about Adami's drawings, by no means do these drawings illustrate his text; when writing of them, Derrida "translates" the drawings without even describing their motifs. Rather, the distinctions between the artistic media and genres are united by something that can be called double-valued writing: "formal writing, discursive writing, and picto-ideo-phonogram."[72] According to Derrida, as much as the philosopher would have liked to inscribe his name on the cartouche and to produce a discourse on it, he is left with the remainder—the work of art—itself.[73] The drawings of the box thus have the structure of remainder. Discursive writing or phonographic writing does not belong to the image but remains heterogeneous to it; the text is never able to touch its "model" or object of study but allows it to rest in its "crypt."[74] The coffin in Titus-Carmel's images is itself a "product": a paradigm, a model, an example, an artifact; it manifests the leftovers of what is verbally expressible.[75]

Derrida's own writing, in its abundance of words, serves as an example of the inconsistence of words and images: his writing is designated to be *around* the works of art but not master them since they are without concept. The discursive writing and the image thus remain apart; the meaning of language is not to turn the works into instances of discourse by telling, for example, what they may "represent" or what they are "about." Derrida's view differs here from that of Heidegger, who argues that all art is original *Dichtung* or poetry in that art "speaks" to us: for Heidegger, all art is "*essentially poetry*."[76] However, this is not linguistic poetry or "poesy," but poetry in a sense that

is equivalent to the happening of truth in the work of art. Poetry, as saying, means in Heidegger the opening of a place for the truth of the work of art. In such place, the truth of art unfolds itself; however, it is not a mimetic truth but the truth of the revelation of what "comes into the Open" in the work.[77] In the work of art, "everything is other than usual." In other words, the truth that art speaks belongs to the singular work of art only by bringing beings to appearance, while it does not tell logical truths. The language of the work therefore only projects the world.

Derrida's ideas of art and truth are similar to Heidegger's from the perspective that meanings in art can never be reduced to any discourse of truth: the philosophical truth does not apply to art, and therefore art does not argue anything.[78] However, for Derrida art does not "speak" in the way described by Heidegger, but is always mute in nature. Art communicates by *showing* a truth without telling it, and only by showing things art makes meanings emerge. The truth is primarily in the works, in the writing they display and of which they are part, not in the subjective mind of the spectator.

One example of the abyssal and yet inseparable relation between word and image is provided by Derrida's treatment of Antonin Artaud's pictograms discussed above, drawings that contain words.[79] According to Derrida's argument, words and images operate in the same way in that they take each other's place constantly inside the work of art; thus, they are equal in value. This means also that words do not suffice to explain anything, and they are not even enough to account for the words that appear in the manner of images in Artaud's paintings. What follows from this conclusion is that the relation between images and words proves to be abysmal for Derrida: the images do not serve to demonstrate anything and therefore do not produce a signifiable object of discourse.[80] Such notion of the image reflects his will to avoid the traditional position of the philosopher as someone who controls meanings: for Derrida, the image is neither presentation, nor interpretation, nor translation, and still less does he conceive it in terms of "comprehension" or "making sense."[81]

The relation between the word and the image is complex: although translation from one language to another is possible to a certain extent, the relation between the image and the word ends up in a difference and therefore in an abyss. Derrida writes on this matter: "In principle, words are translatable . . ., but what associates words and images is not, and therefore it contains peculiar issues."[82] What is important in the image is not simply the immediately visible, but also the words that inhabit images and the invisibility that determines their logic outside the visual. Invisibility means interruption and ellipse, and all the field of the invisible that presses on the visible.[83] In the film *D'ailleurs, Derrida*, we can find interrupted sequences—but it is up to the spectator if he or she will perceive such sequences, if he or she will follow the montage

or not: "As a result, the image as image is pressed upon by invisibility. Not forcibly like the sonorous invisibility of the words, but another invisibility, and I think that the anacoluthon, the ellipsis, the interruption perhaps forms what is proper to this film," Derrida says.[84]

Images join other images and words as if they were taken from different contexts and placed into one whole. In Derrida's analysis, the fitting together of the parts creates abysses between them. The abysses, in turn, produce multiplying differences inside each image, which makes the cut thus analogous to the creation of differences: in a film, for example, not one difference, but a thousand in the proliferating sequences.[85] Images themselves are therefore creative; they produce an unending process, in which the elements join other elements in an unforeseeable way that makes the image an untotalizable sum of differences. The image remains without identity, with no essence given beforehand, as to speak of "essence" would amount to speaking of a totality.[86]

Derrida seems to suggest here that we may never pinpoint exactly where the image "itself" is, as it disintegrates as soon as it is gathered in the eyes of the spectator. In the sphere of the visual arts, his understanding of the image appears somewhat analogous to the model provided by assemblage and collage: in them, different forms are used to make a new whole by the employment of different materials, sources, and media, both artist-made and found objects.

The nonintegrality that is constitutive to Derrida's idea of image becomes visible also in Roland Barthes's *punctum* that serves as an example of a similar operation.[87] When there is *punctum*, a blind field is created within the image—the *punctum* appears as "a kind of subtle off-screen [*hors-champ*]—as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see," to quote Peter Brunette and David Wills's expression.[88] The *punctum* evokes the play of the trace between absent and present and signals the dissolution of a clearly demarcated, framed distinction between the outside and the inside. The *punctum* is not, however, a transcendental meaning: it is a supplement, an addition that nonetheless is already there in the photograph.[89] *Punctum* thus designates an ambiguous play of presence and absence and the play of death, as Barthes tells in the second part of *Camera Lucida*, where the *punctum* comes to challenge the institutional framework of reference within the system of representation as well.

Derrida describes the functioning of *punctum* in an eulogy for Barthes, "Les morts de Roland Barthes," in which the *punctum* takes the form of supplement and the phantom of a concept. This is to point out that "space, reference and death become part and parcel of photography"—that is, disintegration is at the core of photographic image.[90]

Derrida's interpretation of the discontinuity of meaning in the image relates not only to Barthes's concept of the *punctum* but also to the analysis of what

Barthes calls "the third order of meaning" in the essay "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills" (1970). The "third meaning" is the kind of meaning that Barthes seeks in visual images and in the photograph in particular. It functions in a way that resembles the *punctum*: the third meaning is an inarticulable order beyond the first-order and the second-order meaning. By the first meaning Barthes refers to the obvious meaning (*sens obvie*) of denotation, of communication and information, while by the second meaning he points to "signification," the symbolical or metaphorical level of meaning of the signified that is based on the first, literal or objective meaning.[91] The third meaning is *signifiance*, the "obtuse meaning" (*sens obtus*) of connotation.

The third, associated meaning is never in the denotative or "analogical" content of the photograph as such.[92] The third meaning emerges from historical and societal connotations, but it also extends outside culture, knowledge, and information: it opens out "into the infinity of language," while it does not belong to the articulated language. It can only be achieved through the visual media when the culturally loaded images collide. The third meaning thus develops through some non-real details, but it appeals to the spectator by creating an impression that affects him or her on a larger scale than a mere artifice: for example, the cinematic images *are* real in the sense that we see them and respond to them.[93]

Barthes describes the third meaning as "a signifier without a signified" that is outside of the system of language and discourse, and even outside the system of symbols.[94] It appears in the fissures and cracks of the filmic image, when we realize that pictures on the film are unique in a limitless number of ways. According to Barthes, we both understand that these images are illusions and that they are, at the same time, real to the perception.[95] The "obtuse," connotative meaning is discontinuous and indifferent to the obvious signification of the narration; this may be perceived in the ways in which text and images encounter various types of images, such as advertisements and cartoons. In them, the image does not illustrate the text, but rather words constitute a "parasitic message" on the image, and they both thus amplify each other's sphere.[96] For Barthes, the obtuse meaning can only come and go, "appearing-disappearing."[97]

Barthes describes the third meaning in terms that resemble Derrida's description of the operations of the *trait*. Both the third meaning or *signifiance* and the *trait* are outside of articulated signification and narration, and they can be approached through their context only. Like the third meaning, the *trait* can never be pointed at or made a theory of. In a way that resembles the working of *différance*, the *trait* gives space for meaning that exists nowhere else outside of the context in which it appears. The effect that arises in the encounter of images is also behind Derrida's idea of the cut in

considering the filmic image: the sequence of images brings about countless meanings that are never present in the images themselves.[98] The kind of nonliteral, nondiscursive meanings described by Barthes and Derrida overflow from denotation and seem to emerge at the limit of significations, as their remains that are not included in any existing system. They are singular and create events that necessarily are culturally burdened, but as Barthes states, without any code of deciphering.[99]

In the last chapters of *Glas*, Derrida approaches the abysmal relation between language and image. A similar difference, an invisible source of unanticipated meanings, seems to appear when an artisan produces "enigmas" that are composed of the two contraries, nature and consciousness, inside and outside, the clear and the obscure.[100] Between the natural and the self-conscious shape, the material and the fabricated form, there is the operation of the *trait*. The outcome of the production is neither purely material nor is it an ideal form that would exist without support, but their hierarchy becomes questioned. The union of the two sides of the work thus always leaves a residue of meaning in art.

A contrary phenomenon to the openness of meaning is a religious monument, which is nothing but its signification for Derrida: "This is the Kaaba, the black stone of Mecca: no remains; all is scraped clean, fished out, inscribed, relieved," he states in *Glas*.[101] The *trait* has a differentiating function that appears like the veil that covers the goddess Neith in the Egyptian religion, which declares that "nature *is a being-differentiated in (it)self*, namely, *an other opposed to its manifestation but which immediately offers itself*, an enigma."[102] The enigma is not, however, the veil itself, nor is it the thing that the veil symbolizes. The structure of the veil is rather suspended between the contraries, the manifest and the disappearing, while it is none of these exclusively. In Derrida and Barthes alike, the differential meaning belonging to the *trait* and the third meaning deconstruct the oppositions and hierarchy between the categories of the visible and the invisible. As it appears, they thus dismantle what has earlier appeared as the foundation of the image.

Derrida's thinking on the image reveals the ground that he shares not only with Barthes but also with Maurice Blanchot. For him, the image always means absence and distance: first, from the thing that the image seems to present, and second, from the maker of the image.[103] Like language, the image thus is connected with Blanchot's ideas of death and dream. According to the ordinary analysis, he argues, the image is secondary to the object: it follows the object, and the image and the object are removed from each other. However, the distance belongs to the very heart of the thing represented by the image. When that thing has become image, it has instantly become something that "no one can grasp, the unreal, the impossible."[104]

The image is essentially absence and distance to Blanchot.[105] However, the object in the image is not the same thing at a distance, but it is the thing *as* a distance. The object that the artist makes an image of is present in its absence; it is graspable because it is ungraspable, appearing as disappeared. Blanchot describes it as the return of what does not come back, the strange heart of remoteness as "the life and the sole heart of the thing."[106] Because the presented thing is absent from the image, disappearance and retreat appear in Blanchot's analysis as the conditions of the image, and due to the distance, the difference that separates us from the things is at our command. Accordingly, the truth of the image exceeds the visible image, an idea that parallels with Heidegger's idea of truth set forth by the work of art.

That the image can exceed existing categories entails that it embraces ambiguity and constitutes a limit between the definite and indefinite. In Barthes's theory, the ambiguity manifests itself in the denotative and the connotative aspects of the image, whereas in Derrida the ambiguity lies in the material appearance of the image and the meanings that arise from it. They are multiplied in the montage of the elements and sequences of images—in *différance* that is at work in them. For Blanchot, the image represents the remains of the imaged thing, but not only this: the image is comparable to a "cadaver" or a "tomb" that always remains at a distance from the thing "itself." The image means therefore an instance of presence and absence at the same time in Blanchot: "The cadaverous presence establishes a relation between here and nowhere."[107] The "tomb" signals here the withdrawal of the artist or the author of a literary text: the image is constituted by the simultaneous lack of the author and the presented thing.

While the vocabulary associated with "death" and the "tomb" is part of Blanchot's discussion of the image, these concepts do not appear in Derrida's theory of the image. Yet, for him like also, the work is opposed to the artist in that the artist is withdrawn from the work.[108] The image is extrinsic to the author, and the fact that the artist leaves the work behind him is the condition of art. The image thus stands separate from its author; from this follows that between the artist and the work is thus a cut or a *trait*. As Derrida writes in *Glas*, "By his withdrawal [*retrait*] the artist consequently raises himself above his remain(s) and in the same stroke [*du même coup*] detains it as a small part, a morsel of himself."[109] There is a cut (*coupure*) between the artist's elaboration and the work, between the author and his remain(s). To close or heal (*cicatricer*) the cut and to think of it, the work must, even in their difference, *remain present* to the artist, without falling from him "like a thing truncated in space." Despite their separation, the artist then has a connection to the work of art, which has a consciousness and will be "time and voice," according to Derrida.

Likewise, Blanchot considers the author and the image as distinct from one another, but in the separation, he perceives a "death" or a "tomb" that also

belongs to the structure of the literary work.[110] Death, in the sense proposed by Blanchot, is the origin of language and signification, even the condition of their existence; accordingly, the relation of philosophy and literature is revealed as their relation to death.[111] In literature, all signification is constantly postponed. The reader cannot make a final representation of what a literary work signifies—no more than one can make a representation of death. Death appears thus to be comparable to the strangeness that belongs to literature and perhaps to any kind of art: it makes us inquire whether in literature we may attain something that is irreducible to existing categories, such as "the same" or the "self," and retain its strangeness. To Blanchot, the experience of strangeness and exteriority (*dehors*) signals the "work of death," namely the unpresentable of language and image. He even calls the presence of the image "cadaverous": in its essential strangeness, the image is cadaver itself.[112] Namely, in the image the cadaver is its own image, as it resembles the corpse—in other words, the image—*himself*; an example of the image as corpse is the death mask. The corpse is a reflection which is becoming the master of the life it reflects, while the image reflects likeness. Yet, this likeness is "like nothing": it is only reconstituted presence.

Like Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy has described the image in terms of the death mask.[113] According to Nancy, in the death mask the spectator can see the presence of absence in the fact that the other person is absent from the mask itself. Through such reflection, the spectator may see his or her own look in the very absence of the other's look. From this perspective, the death mask even forms a paradigm of the image for Nancy, since it makes visible the fact that a thing presents itself in the image. The ability to show itself can even be considered his definition of the image.[114]

Nancy's view of the image as a showing-itself (*le se-montrer*) has its origin in Heidegger's interpretation of the image, *Bild*, that is presented in paragraph 20 of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. There, Heidegger brings out that what he calls *Abbild*, the primary image, always shows itself as a gaze turned toward us. Therefore, the image makes an image by resembling a gaze.[115] According to Nancy, this means that the primary image is for Heidegger an image—or resemblance—of an image understood as monstration, showing-itself. The image, however, does not show only itself, but it also shows a general *Aussehen*: a seeming like something and looking outward as something. From this, Nancy draws the conclusion that the image as *eidos* or "idea" is the showing-itself in general of "every possible particular *aspect*."[116] At the center of Heidegger's interest is *Aussehen*, which has a double meaning: it is both the aspect by which something shows itself and the effect by which the image appears to regard our gaze.[117] The image has, therefore, a double sense: not only does it show itself while looking like something, but it also appears to look at us, like the death mask.

As mentioned above, the idea of death is not present in Derrida's theory of image as emphatically as in Blanchot or Nancy. For Blanchot, death belongs to the structure of the image and presents itself as the inexhaustible and finally unexplored source of meaning that he terms the "night"; for Nancy, the face of the dead forms a model of image in the way its gaze shows itself in the death mask. In both Nancy and Blanchot, death expresses the necessary distance between the image and the presented thing.

The idea of distance is yet also part of Derrida's concept of the image that focuses on the differentiation between its interior and exterior. In *Specters of Marx*, he speaks of the spirit of Marx wandering in Europe in the guise of a specter with a helmet that covers its face. The ghost's armor lets one see nothing of the spectral body, but it permits the ghost—perhaps the ghost of Hamlet's father—to see and to speak.[118] Derrida calls this nonreciprocal seeing "the visor effect," *l'effet de visière*: it is the power to see without being seen, as we do not see who looks at us.[119] Seeing without a sense of mutuality means the ungraspable visibility of the invisible. Yet Derrida sees here another aspect in that we may feel that the spectral figure appears to look—*il nous regarde*—but such seeing takes place outside of any synchrony. The visor effect is therefore a reverse phenomenon to the imagined look of the death mask that offers the illusion of looking back at the spectator. The look of the specter behind the visor prevents all identification to the other; it is the image of the image, a Platonic *phantasma* and a *simulacrum*.

In Derrida's account, the effect is not suspended even when the visor is raised. The visor offers itself here as an available resource and structure: its power is its possibility, and it suffices that the armor be possible.[120] In *The Specters of Marx*, Derrida points that "you do not see it [the specter] seeing" from behind the helmet, the specter who it remains invulnerable beneath its visored armor.[121] Because the specter is seen at a distance, it now represents a pure image to the one who encounters it: because the specter cannot reveal its "true" face—since there is none—it is never present to the spectator as itself, or it is present only in its absence. From the distance at the foundation of the specter, in other words, the image, follows its allegedly invincible power. The idea of such pure image leads Derrida to state: "So one speaks of nothing else but in order to chase it away, to exclude it, to exorcise it"—and such is the fate of Marx's ghost in Europe.[122]

Yet, Derrida remarks, the figures of the ghost in literature are primarily faces. Therefore, the example above is thus a matter of masks, "if not, this time, of a helmet and a visor."[123] That the image assumes the figure of the specter, or the specter the appearance of the image, thus refers to a certain precondition of the image: to be an image, the externality between the thing and the image has to remain, although the externality of the thing is unconscious of itself.[124]

The spectrality of the image makes its existence solely visual, which gives it an affinity with Derrida's idea of the nature of the portrait, namely its ruined, specter-like existence. Right from the beginning, from the first gaze, the portrait resembles ruins: as Derrida describes it, the face of the self-portrait looks at "the face as the memory of itself, what *remains* or *returns* as a specter from the moment one first looks at oneself and a figuration is eclipsed."[125] The figure or the face thus loses its integrity, yet without disintegrating. The portrait, as a visible monument, is incomplete because it is composed of *traits*: its structure is eclipsing, which is to say, only suggested and at the edge of the invisible: "remarked, pointed out, impotent or incapable of being reflected in the shadow of the self-portrait."[126]

In the book *Veilleuses* (Night Lights), Ginette Michaud analyzes four photographs that reveal the spectrality belonging to the structure of Derrida's notion of the image. These photographs have been taken by Jean-Luc Nancy in 2003 at Derrida's house in Ris-Orangis, a Parisian suburb.[127] The photographs show desktops with papers and envelopes with writing, pens and other small, seemingly random objects, as well as framed photos of Derrida. In the images, Michaud sees an invisible body of the philosopher, a body that is immaterial and therefore radically impossible to be represented. Like Derrida's self-portraits, they portray a "memory of the trait," the blind origin of thought and image.[128] Whereas Derrida is not actually present in the photographed objects, he nonetheless is present in them via his absence: our inability to see him in the pictures, our blindness, is the very condition of portraying him in absence.

According to Michaud, the condition of invisibility gives to Derrida a true visibility, "the truest of all."[129] Only the fact that Derrida is not visible himself and that his belongings, as traces of his past presence, remain visible, may produce a portrait. This view is parallel to Derrida's idea that the image is not an object, for it neither has an essence nor can it be presented as a totality.[130] Therefore, it cannot be called a "work"; in the photographs taken by Nancy, the portrayed objects are rather kind of traces. These traces of Derrida's life and work function like ruins. Presented as photographed objects, they are without essence or substance, without intention or destination.[131]

When portrayed either in or as image, all things become signifying and equal in value, however impersonal and unimportant they may seem in reality. The image, like the work of art, thus appears as a self-portrait of its own presentation, but also, as in the photographs taken by Nancy, as a portrait of the philosopher to whom all the objects belonged. Like ruins, the photographs may collapse at any moment in the absence of their true "subject" or reference—like ruins, they may also refer to any kind of imaginable past, as the associations evoked by the image show to be unlimited. As fragments of the past, the photographed "ruins" on the desktop are incomplete and lack

totality, for the images of life portrayed by them remain only fragmentary. As such, however, these images are complete and offer a sense of potentiality: the unpresented and invisible gives the image the possibility for all future meanings.

THE IMAGE AND THE OBJECT

In Derrida's theory of the image, the image is not an object but a type of trace. Like the trace, the image exists beyond all categories of objects, representation, and visibility.[132]

In order for the image to be called an object would require that its borders could be defined. This, in turn, would imply that the image had an essence or a substance. Derrida's idea is contrary to essential thinking: for him the image is a form of writing, which as a system is neither closed nor tied to any logic of the visual; instead, the image exceeds such systems. It does not signify in the sense of making any available meaning visible.[133] That the image belongs to the category of the trace is to say that it is never an instance of "figuration," for the trace cannot be made a figure of. The image joins in new chains of significations and is thus unendingly open to new meanings.

An example of the relation between image and language is provided by the book *Lignées*, the fifth volume of the *Mille e tre* series that features 200 *encre de Chine* drawings by Micaëla Henich. The *Mille e tre* project is composed of five independent volumes, and it includes altogether 1,003 drawings by Henich and texts by Derrida and four other authors.[134] In *Lignées*, below each of the 200 drawings, is a brief fragment-like text written by Derrida. The drawings, all in a rectangular form and in the same size, two on each page of the book, are black and white, and they display deconstructed sceneries with architectural forms. The written texts never illustrate Henich's drawings; rather, the drawings themselves generate text, and Derrida's poetic writings add another layer to them. By the side of drawing 926, he writes:

> Is not a maelstrom always one that comes from the sea (*mare*, husband, grammar)? Then it would eventually leave in the seabed all the petroglyphs he would first sink as if they were ships in distress. And like algae between the stones, the words would be given to me. These drawings give me language because, not speaking, they speak to me too much, they speak to me. They make me speak, they give me language without giving me the word—because, in truth, the word is not given to me.[135]

Drawing number 829 is accompanied by the following words that also refer to the abysmal relation between words and images: "What am I looking

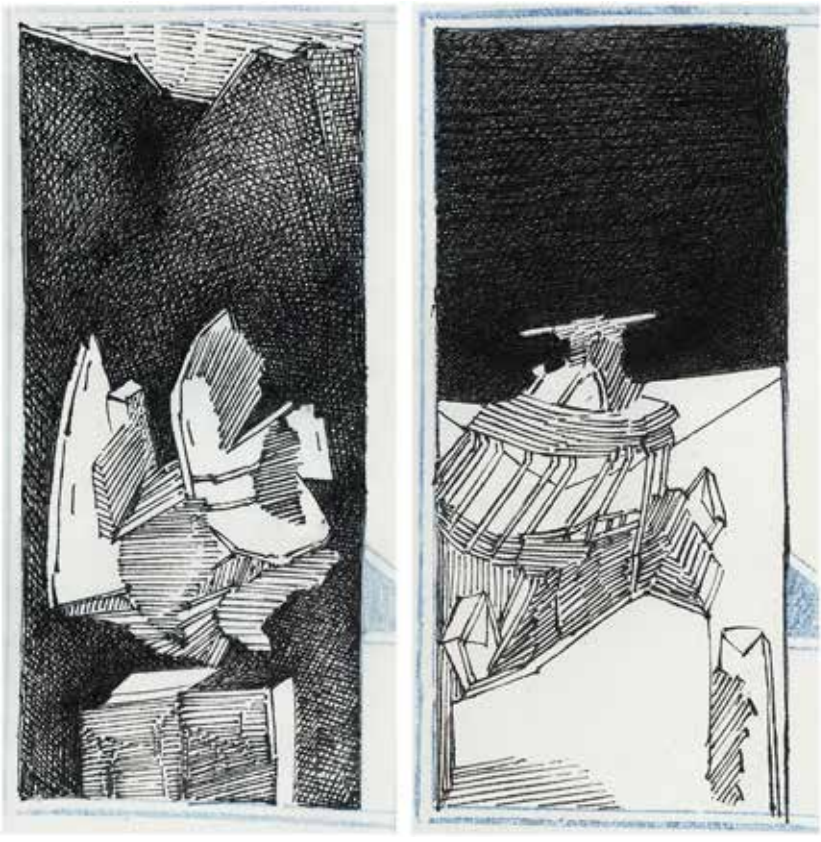


Figure 7.1 Micaëla Henich: *Mille e tre, 5: Lignées*, published by William Blake & Co., *encre de Chine* on paper, 1996. © Micaëla Henich and Éditions William Blake & Co. (BP n° 4, F-33037 Bordeaux, France).

for with her? One must especially abstain from dramaturgy, *narrative*, sequence, everything that is articulated and becomes part of a chain, the symbol itself. She draws only by interrupting. A rosette of surmounted interruptions."[136]

Derrida's phrases repeat recurring themes, and there is similar repetition in Micaëla Henich's ink drawings. Both the images and the texts seem to be on the border of the figurative: the drawings resemble recognizable things—towns and other constructions, landscapes with cliffs and cascades, sometimes human-like figures—but they may also be seen as abstract configurations. The intensity of the drawings varies according to the alteration of black and white in the space of the image. The rhythm of the lines changes from one detail to another, from one image to another, whereas the thickness

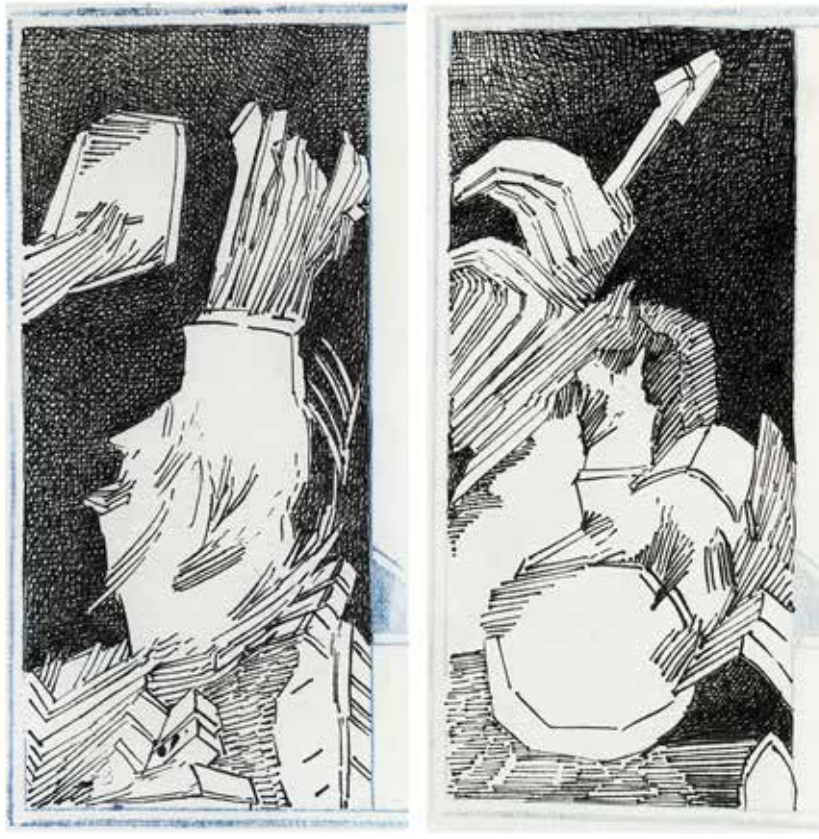


Figure 7.1 (Continued)

and quality of the individual lines are similar. In Derrida's texts, the themes of the trace, the *trait* and the proper names are repeated. He writes of the images, yet without describing what there is in them; indeed, beneath image number 866, Derrida states: "I only speak of what I see, forwards or backwards."[137] Rather than any pictorial representations, Derrida's texts refer to associations, and the words speak of things that one cannot directly point at in the drawings. Thus, the images remain on the verge of the figurative and the nonfigurative, while being neither of these entirely. In a similar manner, the texts touch upon the limit of what is presented in the images, but their connection to the images is most often associative and metaphorical in nature. The texts seem to refer to the potentiality of the drawings, keeping the distance between the image and language.

The differentiating function of the *trait* is a permanent theme in Derrida's texts in *Lignées*. Below image 836, he writes: "The old Jewish cemetery of Prague. *Stones* both planted and grown out of the cries screamed at the sky. Upright positions are piled up. (No) more space. One can only substitute the bodies and the souls: why see it everywhere, as if she [Micaëla Henich] showed me only this, this cemetery where I do not stand on the grave of any of my kin, no more than her? The interpretation of her traits, if it were possible, would suggest that we have stolen a common place for our deceased, that we would have an appointment at the cemetery, that day, at that hour."[138] The *trait* appears as the abyss that divides the image from the word. Together, they arrive at the gap that separates them and keeps them together at the same time: at this point, the drawing and the writing are exposed to one another, to the uniting and dividing operation of the *trait*. In this mutual exposition, they affect each other, in the same way as the work of the artist and the work of the philosopher do.

In his entire *œuvre* and in *Memoirs of the Blind* in specific, Derrida suggests that the lack of essence characterizes the image: we never come to see the image "itself" but always only what lies as if between its *traits*. The image appears to us not as it is since we can never know it, but rather in the form of trace, *trait*, ruins, and specter. Because the trace is unattainable as such, the image must be sought outside of any notion of figure. In art, the unfigurable or the inexpressible receives a figure—in such process, a dislocation of sense takes place, as the sense can never be the same.[139]

Such notion resonates with Derrida's doubt toward the traditional paradigm of seeing and the ideas of truth and knowledge connected to it. According to his argument, even the blind man may be a seer, a visionary. It follows that there is always a double genitive at issue in his saying that "a drawing of the *blind* is a drawing *of* the blind."[140] This is what makes the image itself blind and gives it a position beyond representation and significations. By suggesting that, contrary to mimetic theories of art, the presence of the "original" can never be reached, Derrida seeks a way to speak of figuration otherwise than as a figure: in question is, rather, the taking or giving figure to the work of art.[141]

That Derrida's notion of the image belongs neither to the category of object nor to that of figure if understood in the sense of form means that the image does not represent a truth of any external thing and that it does possess an identity. Instead, he uses metaphors that express the opposite: the image is concerned with the thinking of intervals, blind spots, breaks, "silence," and "secret." The silent interval exists in the countless differences of which the image consists: they may be encountered in the play between light and shadow, like in the contrasts of a photograph. Is the image in the relations of

contrasting elements only?[142] Namely, how to be without seeing: *ne pas voir*? If we think that the visible becomes visible only on the very limit of its disappearing and retreating into the invisible, this would equal Derrida's idea of the inappearing *trait* that does not initiate anything.[143] As the visible appears thus on the verge of a thing's coming into presence, whereas it does not exist in the form of static presence, a truth, for example.

What defines the Derridean image, albeit negatively, is that it does not belong to the scheme of representation. That something was represented in art would imply the reproduction of things, of sameness. Were this possible, the thing that the image was image or truth *of* would be determined at the same time. Yet, if we suppose that no such truth exists, it follows that, for example, in Gérard Titus-Carmel's *Tlingit Coffin* drawings there is no truth or higher idea available concerning the drawn thing, which in its turn generates new images and other works of art. The little mahogany coffin is itself a "product" with no absolute privilege with respect to a series of productions or reproductions.[144] Their *traits* are only shadows or phantoms; Derrida calls the drawn coffin a "paradigm," a constructed and fabricated structure, a model that is multiplied, serialized, and displaced 127 times in Titus-Carmel's series of works. In them, the older version is effaced in the emergence of a new one, when the previous one is exceeded. Things are thus inscribed on one another in this structure of invagination that Derrida calls *un "récit" du récit*: it happens when a writer or an artist moves from one version to another.[145] Such an interplay between versions or *récits* following one another implies repetition and use of citations within a series of works of art. Ginette Michaud terms this process *sériciation*, "serial citation," which Derrida uses in analyzing Colette Deblé's paintings.[146] Being part of a series, repetition and citations between images are inseparable from their singularity, from the unicity of the instant that may be grasped in every photogram, for example. The photograph has been taken at an exact point of time at a particular place; thus, it is singular. Yet, its singularity has the quality of "once and for all."[147] This thinking resonates with the parergonal model, in which the image manifests a truth that is always something extrinsic to it: the image does not propose anything as a model or a paradigm, but appears as an "(exemplary) sentencing *of the example*: damned paradigm."[148]

Derrida's notions of repetition and quotation are implied in the logic of the trace and *trait*. Trace belongs to the very movement that provides space and time for signification.[149] The idea that the *trait* has no model in the world means that line has a tracing potency: it conveys the meaning of the "originary pathbreaking" (*frayage*), in other words, a moment of the graphic act.[150] Yet the *trait* is not a secondary aspect or an aftereffect of anything that already exists—such as the figures of a drawing—but it is the

withdrawal or the eclipse, the differential inappearance.[151] Consequently, neither the presence nor the absence of the *trait* can be pure, but both present and absent at the same time. Evidently, a similar principle applies to Derrida's idea of written text in that both writing and the *trait* are organized around a constitutive absence and inappearance instead of presence, and the thing itself always escapes.[152] The sense of things thus takes place in the infinite withdrawal that every appearance traces and effaces at the same time: in Derrida's words, "it is *there* but out there, *beyond*, within repetition."[153]

Crucial for Derrida is that no sight is identical with itself, an idea that forces the philosopher to fall silent. As the paradigm of "clear seeing" is not valid in speaking of art, he objects to the thought that it would fit into the categories of knowledge and truth: it is that the traces of art do not lead into them. For Derrida, the image exists outside of the scheme of the figure. Therefore, the truth of the image remains nowhere but within the very work of art, but the truth is outside of every representation. For this reason, it is irreducible to philosophy. The traces left on the work are destined to disappear in their presentation, which makes the truth vanish as soon as it emerges.

NOTES

1. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977; "The Age of the World Picture," 1938). In taking the world as an image, the present comes to be understood as *Vorhandenheit*, "presence-at-hand" or "availability," when the present is re-presented (*Vor-stellen*) as given presence by the subject.

2. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 25.

3. For the art historical implications of Derrida's thinking, see especially Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2005), 263–264 (*Devant l'image*, 1990); Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), and Éliane Escoubas, *Imago Mundi* (Paris: Galilée, 1986).

4. This view is shared by most theoreticians of the image since the age of realism.

5. Jacques Derrida, *Trace et archive, image et art* (Bry-sur-Marne: INA Éditions, 2014), 37–39. The interview and discussion on the theme of the image are based on a seminar organized by Collège iconique on June 25, 2002.

6. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 57 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 61).

7. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 91, 104.

8. For example, Julian Hochberg, "Perception," in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 24, ed. Jane Turner (London: Grove, 1996), 375–386.

9. Hochberg, "Perception," 375.

10. Ellen Esrock, "Imagery: Visual Imagery in Reading," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 2, ed. Michael Kelly (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 462–466.

11. Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1960).

12. See, for example, Alan Tormey, "Seeing Things: Pictures, Paradox and Perspective," in *Perceiving Artworks*, ed. John Fisher (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1980), 59–75.

13. Jacques Morizot, "Qu'est-ce qu'une image peut dire?," in *Dictionnaire d'esthétique et de philosophie de l'art*, eds. Jacques Morizot and Roger Pouivet (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007), 247.

14. Morizot, "Qu'est-ce qu'une image peut dire?," 248.

15. See Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990), 295 (cit. Morizot, "Qu'est-ce qu'une image peut dire?," 248).

16. Dominic Lopes, *Understanding Pictures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 190–192 (cit. Morizot, 250).

17. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, edited and translated by Rocco Sinisgalli (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 1.19 (p. 39; orig. *De pictura*, 1435; *Della pittura*, 1436).

18. Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, esp. 244–259 (*Devant l'image*, 290–318).

19. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 6 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 10).

20. G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to Aesthetics. The Introduction to the Berlin Aesthetics Lectures of the 1820s*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 70.

21. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 19–20.

22. Cf. Derrida, "Sending: On Representation," 307–308 (*Psyché*, 120).

23. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 37.

24. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 11 (*Au fond des images*, 27).

25. Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, 141 (*Devant l'image*, 173).

26. Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 126.

27. Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, 142 (*Devant l'image*, 174).

28. Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, 142 (*Devant l'image*, 174).

29. Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, 143 (*Devant l'image*, 175).

30. In *Trace et archive*, Derrida is interviewed on the topic of the documentary film *D'ailleurs, Derrida* (*Derrida's Elsewhere*, 1999).

31. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 37.

32. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 331. Michaud refers in specific to Derrida's essays *Prégnances: Lavis de Colette Deblé, Peintures* and "Les morts de Roland Barthes" (1981), in Derrida, *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, 61–62.

33. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 231–232 ("De la couleur à la lettre").

34. See esp. Nancy, *The Muses*, 1–39 (*Les Muses*, 11–70).

35. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 22–23.

36. Michaud, "Ombres portées," 330.
37. Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 110.
38. François Soulages, "Avant-propos," in Derrida, *Trace et archive, image et art*, 9.
39. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 331 ("Entretien: Le cinéma et ses fantômes").
40. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 38.
41. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 25, 40.
42. Examples of the influence of *ekphrasis* in art are, for example, in Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 201 ("Le dessin par quatre chemins" and 221 ("De la couleur à la lettre"). See also Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 249.
43. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 40–49.
44. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 47–48.
45. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 49.
46. Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 100.
47. Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 118.
48. Jacques Derrida, "Living On: Border Lines," trans. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, eds. Harold Bloom et al. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, 75–176), 100. See also *The Truth in Painting*, 166–167 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 189–192). Here Derrida writes of the χ, the Greek letter *khi*, which for him signals the form of the chiasmus, intersection and chimeras, and therefore of difference. Derrida sees such operation at work in Valerio Adami's drawings that are inspired by his book *Glas*: these drawings involve disarticulation, dissociation and dislocation—and "the disjointed" that "now forms a work." The disjointedness belongs to the union of writing and drawing in Adami's works.
49. Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 106–107.
50. Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 107.
51. Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 67 ("The Third Text").
52. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 242–243 ("Les 'dessous' de la peinture, de l'écriture et du dessin: support, substance, sujet, suppôt et supplice").
53. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 247.
54. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 250.
55. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 243.
56. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 248. Cf. Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* and Nancy, *Corpus*.
57. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 248.
58. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 45.
59. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 46.
60. Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent," 309.
61. Potestà, "L'exhibition de l'absent," 309.
62. See Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 118–119.
63. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 35–36. Apart from montage, the cutting of the film has yet another connotation. Derrida considers it to be comparable to the act of circumcision: a cutting that does not disconnect anything or take anything apart (*une coupure qui ne coupe pas*).
64. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 41.

65. Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 83.

66. A comparable notion is offered by Jean Baudrillard's *Society of the Spectacle* and its theory of the simulacra, which refers to the idea that reality and meanings have become symbols and signs in the late twentieth century, and that human experience is a simulation of reality.

67. Gregory Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), esp. 98–100. Referring to Valerio Adami's drawing *Ich*, Derrida speaks of what he calls the "picto-ideo-phonogram." *Ich* is a drawing with a fish and handwritten text by both Adami and Derrida. It combines image and words, or global and singular elements. Yet each word appears outside language, for each letter has a singular handwritten character. "The bursting of speech in drawing" is unrepresentable, outside discourse, like a patch of color in graphesis. As Derrida concludes, "*Ich* splits with one blow, like the fish, both language and the picture." *The Truth in Painting*, 159–160 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 182). Cf. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology*, 121.

68. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology*, 99.

69. Jacques Derrida, "The Purveyor of Truth," trans. William Domingo et al., *Yale French Studies* 52 (1975): 88, cit. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology*, 102. (Derrida, *La Carte postale: De Socrate à Freud et au-delà*, Paris: Flammarion, 1980, 478–479; *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 467).

70. The works discussed by Gregory Ulmer include Titus-Carmel's *Tlingit Coffins* and Valerio Adami's painting *Ich*. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology*, 121–123; see the journal *Derrière le miroir* 214 (May 1975; Paris: Maeght Éditeur).

71. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 186 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 214).

72. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 159–160 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 182).

73. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 189–190 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 218).

74. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology*, 118–119; Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 189–190 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 187–188).

75. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 195 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 224).

76. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 72. Italics in the original.

77. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 73–74.

78. See the chapter "On the Muteness and Blindness of Images: Deconstruction and the Work of Art" of this book; cf. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology*, 118.

79. Derrida, "Maddening the Subjectile," 170–171.

80. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 295–296 (*La Carte postale*, 317).

81. Charles Ramond, "Derrida lecteur d'Artaud: la déconstruction à sens unique," in *Derrida et la question de l'art*, ed. Adnen Jdey (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2011), 52.

82. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 330–331 ("Le cinéma et ses fantômes").

83. "Ce qui compte dans l'image, ce n'est pas simplement ce qui est immédiatement visible, mais aussi bien les mots qui habitent les images, l'invisibilité qui détermine la logique des images, c'est-à-dire l'interruption, l'ellipse, toute cette zone d'invisibilité qui presse la visibilité." Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 331.

84. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 332.

85. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 42.
86. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 44–48.
87. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 55–57, 59.
88. Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 111.
89. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 55.
90. Derrida, *Psyché*, 280, 291–292.
91. Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 37 ("Rhetoric of the Image," 1964).
92. See Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 17 ("The Photographic Message," 1961).
93. In "The Third Meaning," Barthes demonstrates the working of the indirect meaning by examining film stills from Sergei Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible* (1944–1946).
94. Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 55, 60–61 ("The Third Meaning," 1970).
95. Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 64–65.
96. Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 25–26.
97. Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 63.
98. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 40ff.
99. Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, 26, 28.
100. Derrida, *Glas*, 255 (Fr. *Glas*, 283–284).
101. Derrida, *Glas*, 255 (Fr. *Glas*, 283).
102. Derrida, *Glas*, 256 (Fr. *Glas*, 284). Italics in the English translation.
103. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 254–263.
104. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 255–256.
105. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 254.
106. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 256.
107. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 256.
108. Derrida, *Glas*, 257–258 (Fr. *Glas*, 285–286).
109. Derrida, *Glas*, 257 (Fr. *Glas*, 286).
110. In his discussions of the image, Derrida does not, however, employ the concepts of "death" and "tomb."
111. Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*, 300.
112. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 256–258.
113. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 80–99 (*Au fond des images*, 147–179).
114. Nancy, *The Muses*, 34 (*Les Muses*, 62). For Derrida, writing in general presents its own presentation: writing means producing a space of writing which "writes and reads *itself*, presents its own reading, presents its own self-presentation, and constantly deducts this incessant operation." Derrida, *Dissemination*, 294 (*La dissémination*, 326).
115. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 87 (*Au fond des images*, 158). Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Fifth, enlarged edition, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997/1973), § 20.
116. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 87 (*Au fond des images*, 158).
117. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 92 (*Au fond des images*, 168).
118. Derrida, *The Specters of Marx*, 7–8 (*Les spectres de Marx*, 27–28).
119. Derrida, *The Specters of Marx*, 7 (*Les spectres de Marx*, 27).
120. Derrida, *The Specters of Marx*, 7–8 (*Les spectres de Marx*, 27–28).

121. Derrida, *The Specters of Marx*, 100 (*Les spectres de Marx*, 164).
122. Derrida, *The Specters of Marx*, 100 (*Les spectres de Marx*, 164).
123. Derrida, *The Specters of Marx*, 113 (*Les spectres de Marx*, 185).
124. Derrida, *Glas*, 258 (Fr. *Glas*, 286–287).
125. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 68 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 72).
126. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 68 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 72).
127. Michaud, *Veilleuses*, 71–108.
128. Michaud, *Veilleuses*, 74; cf. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 3 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 10).
129. Michaud, *Veilleuses*, 75.
130. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 50–51.
131. Cf. Michaud, *Veilleuses*, 79.
132. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 50–51.
133. Derrida, *Trace et archive*, 65–67.
134. Micaëla Henich realized the drawings between 1989 and 1991. Apart from Derrida, the four other writers of the *Mille e tre* volumes are Dominique Fourcade, Tom Raworth, Michael Palmer, and Jacques Roubaud. The last three of the 1003 drawings, numbered 1001, 1002 and 1003, remain without text. All drawings measure 16 x 6 centimeters, except drawing number 1003, which measures 370 × 150 centimeters. Jacques Derrida and Micaëla Henich, *Mille e tre, 5: Lignées* (Bordeaux: William Blake & Co., 1996) (s. p.); see also Micaëla Henich's website, accessed March 12, 2021, http://micaela-henich.com/mille-e-tre.
135. "Un maelstrom n'est-il pas toujours de la mer (*mare*, mari, grammaire)? Alors il finirait par déposer dans les fonds marins tous les pétroglyphes qu'il aurait d'abord fait sombrer comme des navires en perdition. Et comme les algues entre ces pierres, les mots me seraient donnés. Ces dessins me livrent au langage parce que, ne parlant pas, ils me parlent trop, ils me parlent. Ils me font parler, ils me livrent au langage sans me donner le mot—parce que le mot en vérité ne m'est pas donné." Derrida and Henich, *Lignées* (s. p.). The drawings in *Lignées* are numbered from 801 to 1000. All translations of this book are by Martta Heikkilä.
136. "Qu'est-ce que je cherche avec elle? Surtout s'abstenir de la dramaturgie, du *récit*, de la séquence, de tout ce qui articule et se prend à la chaîne, le symbole même. Elle ne dessine qu'en interrompant. Une rosace d'interruptions surmontées." Derrida and Henich, *Lignées*.
137. "Je ne parle que de que je vois, à l'endroit ou à l'envers." Derrida and Henich, *Lignées*.
138. "Le vieux cimetière juif de Prague. *Pierres* à la fois plantées et dressées de cris poussés vers le ciel. Verticales entassées. Plus de place. On ne peut que substituer les corps et les âmes: pourquoi le voir partout, comme si elle ne me montrait que ça, ce cimetière où pas plus qu'elle je ne me recueille sur aucun des miens? La lecture de ses traits, si elle était possible, supposerait que nous ayons volé un lieu commun pour nos morts, que nous ayons rendez-vous dans un cimetière, tel jour, à telle heure." Derrida and Henich, *Lignées*.
139. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 209–210 (*La Dissémination* 238).
140. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 2 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 10).

141. See Derrida, *Prégnances*, 13.

142. See Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes*, 42f.; Michaud, "Ombres portées," 331.

143. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 11 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 16: "Un trait n'apparaît jamais, jamais en lui-même, jamais une première fois. Il commence par se retirer.")

144. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 194–195 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 224).

145. Derrida, "Living On: Border Lines," 102.

146. See Derrida, *Prégnances*.

147. Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 266 ("*Aletheia*"). See also Michaud, "Ombres portées," 332.

148. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 196 (*La Vérité en peinture*, 226).

149. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 70 (*De la grammatologie*, 102).

150. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 45 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 50).

151. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 53 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 58).

152. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 104 (*La Voix et le phénomène*, 165); cf. Nicole Anderson, "(De)Constructing Technologies of Subjectivity," *Scan, Journal of Media Arts Culture* 3, no. 3 (December 2006), accessed January 29, 2021, http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=87.

153. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 300 (*L'écriture et la différence*, 436).

Conclusion

The Complicated Liaison of Art and Philosophy

Jacques Derrida's writings touch persistently upon the interaction between art and philosophy and the way in which these affect each other. This interplay entails inquiring about how philosophy can deal with singular, material works of art. As the most general horizon, there is the question of the possibility of conceptualizing art, of speaking of art philosophically. In deconstructive thinking, the answer lies not in suggesting what the positive essence of art might be and how it lends itself as an object of thinking, but in a fundamental undecidability that leaves the scope of the work of art open to questioning. It opens horizons for broader reflection: what are the possibilities of theoretical criticism in the realm of art in general, and contemporary art in specific?

By bringing together the study of works of art and philosophy, my aim has been to examine critically whether the two discourses, namely philosophy of art and art research, can coexist and contribute to each other. This "transgressive" attitude includes the analysis of language that Derrida employs in discussing artistic phenomena and the field of the aesthetic. It is possible to read his philosophy of art by distinguishing the deviating paradigms of art provided by painting, drawing, and photography. It is also possible to discern two divergent models in his accounts of art, namely those of the frame and the *trait* that are treated in *The Truth in Painting* and *Memoirs of the Blind*, respectively; as it appears, the paradigms of the frame and the *trait* cross the limits of the different arts.

In all the arts, the operation of *différance* is at play. In painting, differing is most subtle among the arts: the *traits* of painting are textual events and operations of *différance* that happen in the materiality, thickness, and tones of the painted surface. In drawing and photography, *différance* operates in the repetition of their *traits*, in the variation of intensity of the lines and mutual dependence of values of light and darkness.

In Derrida, art does not emerge from a general, abstract idea that would give it unity and furnish it with a permanent identity that would henceforth enable us to identify works of art as its instances. By resisting such distinction, he wants to show what is at stake in the old hierarchy between the "higher" idea of art and its particular, accidental instances, works of art. In his accounts of art, Derrida sees the identity of the work as abysmal rather than founded in its concept or the subject of aesthetic experience: hence, the work remains without any place and constant presence and is closely associated with his theory of "trace." Like the trace, art exists as "writing," the outcome of constant processes of differences. In addition, works of art present themselves to the spectator at different times and in changing situations and circumstances.

Even if it is evident that Derrida does not give art an autonomous identity in the sense of Modernist theories, it is still possible to inquire the philosophical autonomy of art in his thinking. Does Derrida formulate a theoretical realm that addresses art and the aesthetic independently, or is art rather part of his wider philosophical questioning that is extended to art? This is visible especially in *The Truth in Painting*. Although Derrida speaks, for example, about the truth in painting, it is arguable to what extent he builds his philosophy on its specificity as an art form, but perhaps rather on the specificity of the discourses related to painting. This question, no doubt, gives us reason to wonder what Derrida, in fact, refers to with "painting": in which sense does it define the scope of his inquiry, and what does painting imply, if we suppose that it delimits his discourse on painting? These topics become even more relevant if we assume that all forms of art and culture are influenced by their boundless contexts and if works of art are instances of differing between them.

In speculating what has formed the beliefs and values of art and its theories after the age of Modernist art and its theories, poststructuralist thinkers such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault have proposed some of the best-known answers in their essays on, for example, the position of the author. Along with them, Derrida's theories have equally grounded and oriented the theoretical directions of the philosophical discussions on art's identity *en abyme*. In this book, the inquiry about Derrida's deconstructive vision of the "work of art" has led us to explore the legacy of poststructuralism today in discussions of the ontology and roles of art, and how the different attitudes today are indebted to what has been called "the postmodern."

For Derrida, painting, perhaps more than any other art, forms a paradigm of what exceeds the attempts at making art an object of philosophy. Instead of asking whether the practices and theories of contemporary painting have changed in essence, Derrida inquires whether it has ever existed "as such," independently of other arts and phenomena of culture. For him, painting consists of

traits and is thus part of the system of writing or text, which makes it possible to analyze it by employing deconstructive strategies. While the "representative," "figurative," or "abstract" natures of works of art are not Derrida's primary interests, he rather explores the limits of the discourses on art in each context. The most compelling problem that Derrida presents to his readers is whether art needs words. However, would it be possible to speak and write around painting and other arts without words? A simultaneous impossibility and necessity—or perhaps necessity in impossibility—between art and language presents itself: "For painting without words is also the audacity to let the unconscious speak."[1]

Although Derrida seems to resist all deciphering and interpretation of images, one can state that he does not stop explaining himself.[2] This makes one speculate on the status of Derrida's commentary, which he himself understands to be a matter of the difference between believing and seeing: "Between believing one sees and seeing between, catching a glimpse—or not."[3] Thus, in front of art, Derrida is a skeptic: before anything else, commenting on art involves the skepticism of the reader, skepsis that originates from the difference between observation and the verbal conclusion.

Why is painting Derrida's primary example of art, after all? This question becomes relevant as, besides painting, the issues associated with drawing are even more obviously at the heart of the aims of deconstruction.[4] Namely, like painting, also drawing and photography are composed of *traits* that make things visible without giving themselves to be seen.[5] In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida seems even to identify "art" and the "work of art" or any image with painting, while not all the examples he discusses are literally paintings; they may be drawings, like in many of Gérard Titus-Carmel's *Tlingit Coffins*, or work created by using mixed media, prints and drawings, such as some of Valerio Adami's works.[6] Is there such as a thing as "painting"—how to speak of painting that is not reducible to the painting as a technique or tradition? Undoubtedly, this ambiguity is consistent with Derrida's overall notion of painting: it extends to the field of other kinds of works and provokes an effect that is comparable to the function of *ecphrasis*. Even then, painting seems to remain the paradigm for his analysis, which is particularly obvious in the essay "Restitutions," where a conflict between two discourses of painting is at stake.

However, despite the centrality of painting in Derrida's analyses, there are equal reasons to state that the paradigmatic art for him might also be photography, at least if art is seen as a realm of difference. Photography presents itself as a domain of productive differences even more than painting and drawing do, in a way that the deconstructive power of photography lies in the variations between light and shadow, black and white, the positive and the negative—qualities that are not reducible to one another but appear only due to their infinitely nuanced coexistence.

The expanding limits of painting and other arts, reflected in Derrida's theory and the practices of contemporary art alike, lead to a fundamentally important question: does something to be called their "essence" exist indeed? Although Derrida's discussion may be concerned with what he terms the "truth in painting," it becomes clear that in his deconstructive reading this does not mean to suggest any ideal inherent in the art of painting, or a point to which art should progress in wider terms. Can we rather state that its truth is fleeting and related to a countless number of contexts—of frames that surround the different discourses of truth? The question of framing, instead of searching for art's intrinsic truths or truths issuing from the author's intentions, has become increasingly topical in contemporary debates on art, where the meaning of the context is provided from various perspectives: society, economy, labor, and technique.[7]

Derrida's discussion extends to the limits of the theory of art and their position as an object of philosophical inquiry, and it is evident that the aims of this questioning are explicitly committed to deconstruction. Although Derrida's and other poststructuralist thinkers' focus is on the philosophical stakes of art and to a lesser extent about works of art as art historical, concrete objects, they have contributed to the recent anti-modernist and anti-aesthetic development of theories and artistic production in remarkable ways. As I have suggested above, this is visible both in relevant literature and in the expanding practices of art, of which installation art—or the work of art understood as installation—and post-conceptual art are some of the most prominent examples.

Like Derrida's, Jean-Luc Nancy's understanding of the "work of art" focuses on the impossibility inherent to the concept of "Art." Instead of art "in general," Nancy emphasizes the idea of art that is never one but exists in singular entities, which are varied intrinsically, and, as he states, fragmented from the beginning. Therefore, there is nothing in essential terms that would give us an immutable idea of the work of art; new works are being produced all the time, and they, in turn, necessitate unprecedented turns in philosophical discussions.

As Derrida, Nancy, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe each claim, art means the originary appearing of sensibility and intelligibility at the same time. For Derrida in specific, this notion involves the critique of the traditional oculocentrism or the emphasis on seeing and visuality in the experience of fine arts. This makes us ask if art is finally "anaesthetic" in nature and thus beyond our immediate sensibility, so that works of art necessarily address the intellect as soon as something becomes perceptible? Art's being anti-aesthetic or anaesthetic, and therefore beyond the realm of classical phenomenology, would be to say that the discourses of seeing and blindness are inseparable. On the other hand, at the crossing of the sensuous and the intellectual, art

draws not only upon the visible but also, and perhaps even more, upon the sense of touch: for Derrida, touching is the most paradigmatic of senses.[8] It always involves a difference between the touching and the touched, which makes touching the place of differing and the site of being. In this respect, touching points to the aesthetic itself.

Following the Kantian manner of thinking, the fields of the sensible and the aesthetic experience appear beyond concepts in poststructuralist theories. As for Derrida, he does not only content himself to making the conclusion that art and philosophy exist separately, but that they also attract one another, a notion that leads to the complexity of their relationship. The emphasis on the ambiguity of art may thus be one of the most enduring insights of the deconstructionist account of art and its works.

With respect to Derrida's corpus, many of his essays on the visual arts may have not, until recently, appeared as central as his most widely read writings that focus on the tradition of philosophy, language, literature, or issues of culture and society. The present study has undertaken to challenge of this notion, which includes the questioning of art and the aesthetic as a sphere at the limits of philosophy. What can philosophy do when it faces the nonlinguistic in art, the radical singularity of its works, which seem to need words but resist assimilation into theoretical systems? If every end of art is a singular act of drawing a boundary to what art is, Derrida's quest appears as anti-Hegelian. His theory differs also from the structure that Hegel assigns to art as the "spiritual work of art"—the sensuous display of the mind's relationship with external reality.[9]

The declaration of the "end of art" has signaled from the 1960s and 1970s onwards a dissociation from the Hegelian aesthetics and the idea of truth implied in art, as well as detachment from the limitations of the system of modern aesthetics as it was formulated by Kant. At the same time, the discourse of the end of art, and especially the end of painting, has created a distance between poststructuralist thinking and Modernist doctrines. Modernist theories emphasized the importance of the medium, since the purpose of each art was seen to be examining the specificity of its own medium and criticizing the concept of art itself and its practices in order to open new possibilities of the medium and progress inside art itself.

The necessity to detach from the previous models of action assigned to artist's profession is especially visible in the production of art today when art is expected to raise consciousness of political issues and global problems. The function of artistic work in society has shifted toward modes of observation and participation, brought about, for example, by the new relevance of science in front of the challenges of technology and climate, as well as changes in social attitudes, growing digitalization, and the development of social media. Complicating or even deviating from this situation, Derrida's emphasis is on

the anti-representational that may still have a political significance. Instead of being representations of the world, forms of anti-representational art have taken precedence in the ways that art participates in and creates novel ways of perceiving the world. The idea of anti-representational art offers us an experience of the fragmentation of the world and opens the question of the ways in which it is reducible or irreducible to existing norms. Therefore, a discussion of the limits of representation contributes to a discussion of the scope of "the political" and undoing its seemingly natural presuppositions. It is my view that Derrida's accounts of art, while addressing established representations and art forms, deconstruct pre-given conceptions of what a work of art is in a manner that proves beneficial also for understanding the challenges presented by contemporary and future forms of art by addressing its infinitely open potentialities.

NOTES

1. Derrida, "De la couleur à la lettre," 223.
2. Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 250–251.
3. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 1 (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, 9: "La différence entre croire et voir, croire voir et entrevoir").
4. See Michaud, *L'art du contretemps*, 238.
5. "[Ce qui] donne à voir sans se donner lui-même à voir." Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir*, 144.
6. The essays "+ R" and "Cartouches" are examples of painting's expansion beyond its limits as well as the extension of the limits themselves.
7. This development is visible in already Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art* and later in the works of several prominent contemporary thinkers, for example, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, and Bernard Stiegler. In the French tradition, the limits between philosophy and its "application" to diverse areas outside of ontology, such as art and aesthetics, appear often as less strict than in the Anglo-American context.
8. See Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy* (*Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*) and Nancy, *Corpus*.
9. See chapter 2.

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Index

adaequatio, 223
Adami, Valerio, 68, 114n38, 116, 135, 162, 198–201, 216n35, 252, 268n48, 269n67
Adorno, Theodor, 46, 224
aesthetic, 1–8, 11–13, 28, 42–47, 52, 60n14, 70, 73, 80, 119n110, 160, 165–69, 230, 245, 274, 277
aesthetic experience, 47, 61n28, 70, 73, 159–60, 274, 277. *See also* experience
aesthetics, 11, 14, 28–29, 31, 35, 46, 54, 61n28, 63n61, 65, 69–70, 77, 94, 99, 116n64, 125, 157–65, 177, 202, 224, 233; deconstruction of, 2, 7, 29–30, 44, 129; Kant's, 52–53, 69, 82, 86–101, 110–12, 118n92, 168, 196, 248; overcoming of, 70, 157–58
Agamben, Giorgio, 154
anaesthetic, 159, 164–65, 173–77. *See also* anti-aesthetic
anti-aesthetic, 1, 3, 5, 73, 90, 159–62, 276
anti-essentiality, 79, 89–90
anti-mimeticity, 79, 133–40, 233–34
anti-modernism, 276. *See also* modernism
anti-representationality, 277–78
arche-writing. *See* writing
architecture, 91, 111; as example, 91–93
archive, 95, 141–43, 233
Aristotle, 43–44, 74, 99, 143; and form, 43–44; and mimesis, 222–23
Artaud, Antonin, 103–7, 253
art criticism, 13, 45–46, 161
arts of space. *See* spatial arts *(arts de l'espace)*
Atlan, Jean-Michel, 56–57, 160–62, 174, 180n21
autonomy, 79, 85, 110; of art, 4, 9, 30–31, 45–46, 70, 155–56, 175, 274; of image, 242–51

Badiou, Alain, 173, 192n268
Barthes, Roland, 4, 13, 76, 105, 141–50, 186n138, 196, 230, 240, 245, 248, 254–57, 274
Bataille, Georges, 42, 52–53, 59, 242
Baudrillard, Jean, 6, 31, 83, 239, 269n66
beauty, 42, 46–48, 52–53, 58, 87, 90–91, 95–96, 98–101, 113n22, 157, 159, 181n42, 197
being, 18–19, 25–26, 28–29, 48–49, 54–57, 81–82, 88, 99–100, 108–9, 118n100, 121n160, 123n215, 126–32, 136–40, 143, 146, 149–51, 165–66, 196, 202, 205, 224–29, 239. *See also différance*; *khôra*; trace; *trait*
Benjamin, Walter, 198, 215n20, 224
Bernard, Émile, 92

Bishop, Claire, 179
Blanchot, Maurice, 119n116, 122n189, 145, 185n111, 232, 242, 256–59
border, structure of, 15, 81–102, 106–7, 133–40, 247, 268n48. *See also* frame; *parergon*

cartouche, 201–4
Cézanne, Paul, 92–94, 208
citation, 171–72, 205–6, 229–30, 265. *See also* seriality
clothing, in Kant, 90–91
color, 103, 129, 153–61, 163, 167–77, 196–203, 210–13, 244, 250
column, 90–91, 97, 101
community, 25, 109, 122n189
context, 6, 26–27, 31–32, 66–70, 72, 75–80, 82–87, 89–90, 93–101, 104, 111–12, 138, 147, 150, 155, 160, 164, 191n256, 199–200, 208–10, 213, 224, 226–28, 245–47, 250, 255, 274–76
contingency, 75, 96, 209
correlationism, 87, 223
Cranach, Lucas, 91, 111, 197

D'ailleurs, Derrida, 150, 246–47, 253–54
death, 30, 109, 144–49, 185n111, 254, 256–59; of art, 155–59, 188n176; of the author, 13, 106–7
death mask, 258–59
Deblé, Colette, 56, 143, 171–73, 265
Debord, Guy, 61n30, 239
deconstruction, 2–7, 11–17, 31–35, 37n24, 86, 118n95, 167, 171, 174, 176–79, 197, 221, 225–27, 275–77. *See also* aesthetics, deconstruction of; work of art, deconstruction of
Derrida's Elsewhere. See D'ailleurs, Derrida
Descartes, René, 74, 123n209
désœuvrement, 25, 51, 79, 100, 107–13, 122n189
Didi-Huberman, Georges, 15, 23, 44, 57, 242, 244–45
différance, 15–21, 48–52, 56–57, 59, 72, 86, 88, 99–100, 102, 110–11, 136, 198–202, 214, 228–34, 273
discourse, 15–21, 24, 26, 29, 59, 65–83, 87–99, 102–3, 111, 138, 151–61, 175–77, 197, 210, 251–53, 269n67, 273–77
dissemination, 82–85, 109–12, 117n71, 231
drawing, 22–24, 29, 32, 50, 103–7, 125–40, 158, 162–63, 168–71, 182n66, 183n76, 196–204, 232, 252–53, 261–66, 271n134–35, 275
Duchamp, Marcel, 73, 153, 156–57

Eisenstein, Sergei, 196, 255
ergon, 69, 72, 81, 89, 92, 94–95, 98–99, 191n256. *See also parergon*
event, 12, 19, 22, 56–60, 80, 92, 104, 112, 119n118, 123n215, 128, 132, 139–40, 142–46, 174, 196–97, 201, 207–8, 211–12, 249–50
examples, status of. *See* exemplarity
exemplarity, 58, 95–96, 132, 145, 195–206
existence, 28, 49, 57, 76, 79, 101–2, 111, 118n100, 127, 191n248, 195, 206, 211, 230, 249–50, 258, 260
experience, 11–14, 17, 23, 49, 66–67, 75, 87, 108–9, 123n192, 137, 139, 146, 151, 159, 164–67, 170, 173. *See also* aesthetic experience

Fathy, Safaa, 246
fiction, 27–29, 96, 116n61, 143, 169–70, 191n248, 207, 221, 252
figure, 30–35, 41–43, 47–48, 51, 56, 74, 89–90, 97, 99–103, 125–40, 150–52, 177, 205, 227, 232–33, 244, 247, 249, 260–61, 264–66. *See also* form
film, 145, 150, 186n140, 195–96, 240, 243–47, 251, 253–55, 268n63. *See also D'ailleurs, Derrida*; *Ghost Dance*
finitude, 43, 49, 69, 117n71, 123n215, 132–33, 247. *See also* being; existence

form, 11–12, 20, 29, 41–60, 62n41, 63n61, 66, 70–85, 92–94, 99–111, 117n82, 118n92, 125–79, 180n21, 183n76, 190n219, 196–203, 208–10, 222–29, 249–50, 261. *See also* figure
formlessness, 42, 50–53, 57–60, 106
Foucault, Michel, 83, 105, 209
foundation, 5, 8, 21, 100, 130, 173, 203, 228, 244–46; of work of art, 174, 249–51, 256. *See also* ground
fragment, 14, 24–27, 33, 35, 112, 115n60, 193n287, 201, 218n87, 251, 276–78; and photography, 143–49, 233; in Romantic theories, 78–79, 247, 260–61
frame, 26–27, 45–46, 65–113, 116n69, 118n92, 118n95, 120n142, 136–37, 157–59, 168, 173–77, 197, 207–10, 247–61
Freud, Sigmund, 186n129, 193n287, 200
Fritscher, Susanna, 211

ghost: figure of, 147–48, 164, 202–4, 259; and photography, 233. *See also* spectrality
Ghost Dance, 148
grammatology, 82, 93, 251–52
grammē, 74, 127, 213, 231
graphein, 129–30, 269n67
graphic, 20, 103, 118n104, 126–32, 147, 168–73, 198, 251, 265–66. *See also* inscription; *trait*; writing
graphic arts, 145. *See also* printmaking
Greenberg, Clement, 45–46, 70–71, 157
ground: of meaning, 5, 18, 59, 62n41, 103–7, 211, 213, 244, 246; in work of art, 49–50, 97–107, 126–29, 151, 154–55, 167, 171, 173–74, 247–50
groundlessness, 48, 51, 57, 72, 100, 118n100, 121n155, 229

Hegel, G. W. F., 5–6, 67, 78–79, 83, 96, 108, 111, 126, 236n40, 277; *Aesthetics,* 46–49, 101, 156, 159, 187n172, 188n176, 243; *Science of Logic,* 62n41
Heidegger, Martin, 16–17, 43, 48–49, 54–58, 63n61, 63n65, 70, 76, 78, 84, 93, 99–102, 108, 115n56, 123n215, 127–29, 151–52, 162–67, 190n219, 199, 204–6, 215n15, 215n28, 236n40, 239, 243, 250, 252–53, 257–58
Henich, Micaëla, 261–64, *262*, *263*, 271n134
heterogeneity: of drawing, 132–33, 138, 203, 232; of image, 9, 170, 250–61; of painting, 169–70, 199–200; of work of art, 25–27, 112, 128–29, 160, 178–79, 182n67, 245, 251–52
Hill, Gary, 147
history, 82–83, 85, 156, 159; of art, 16, 24, 102, 126, 153–54, 166–67, 172, 241; of metaphysics, 54, 221
hors-d'œuvre, 81–86, 90, 173–74. *See also* supplement
Husserl, Edmund, 123n192, 148, 227–28

Idealism, 27–28, 48
ideality, 22, 25, 46–47, 51, 57, 59, 75, 83, 109–11, 129–32, 163, 170, 191n256, 195, 201–2, 209, 227–29, 243
image, 17–35, 98, 104–7, 119n116, 131–33, 232–34, 239–66; photographic, 140–52
inscription, 17–18, 20–21, 59, 97, 127, 129–30, 208, 226. *See also* writing
installation art, 71, 177–79
intertextuality, 245

judgment of beauty, in Kant, 47, 53, 87, 91, 95, 114n22, 157, 197

Kant, Immanuel, 42, 47, 52–53, 58, 70, 82, 86–92, 95–102, 111–13, 113n22, 117n89, 118n92, 120n132, 157–59, 168, 187n172, 196–97, 226, 235n23, 247–48, 277
khôra, 37n24, 56–57, 76, 85, 117n82, 167, 180n22, 202–3

Lacan, Jacques, 33
Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe, 11–15, 27–35, 70, 79, 169–70, 221, 224–25, 230–31, 276
language, 6, 34–35, 52, 74–77, 82–83, 86–89, 93, 98, 103–4, 110–11, 116n61, 116n64, 119n114, 119n116, 127, 130–32, 138–39, 145, 155, 158, 164–66, 175, 183nn69–70, 258; and art, 11–29, 159–62, 195–214, 224–26, 241–56, 261–63, 269n67, 273–78; and color, 166–71; poetic language, 163
limit. *See* border, structure of
literature, 17, 69, 84–85, 109–13, 118n111, 123n209, 231–32, 257–59
logos, 16, 20, 23, 29, 85, 202, 210, 231, 249
Lyotard, Jean-François, 58, 75, 83, 114n38, 135–36, 199–201

Magritte, René, 206
Mallarmé, Stéphane, 79, 231–32
Marx, Karl, 259
materiality, 19, 42, 48, 55, 58–59, 74–78, 85, 132, 139, 141, 177, 213, 248–50, 273; of color, 29, 155, 158, 162, 167–71, 212; of language, 16, 138–39, 164
McMullen, Ken, 148
medium, 26, 45–47, 103, 162, 167, 179, 277; and image, 240, 242–43; and mimesis, 233; of painting, 175–76, 203, 206
medium-specificity, 14, 46, 154–55, 157, 175–76
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 11–12, 61n28, 86, 134–35, 152, 244
metaphysics, 15, 18, 28, 43, 54, 71–72, 88, 109, 127, 223; and art, 99, 166, 169; of presence, 5, 18, 22, 48–49, 56, 81, 108, 199, 227
mimesis, 27–35, 134, 196, 221–34, 240
mimetology, 227, 232
mise en abyme, structure of, 72, 100, 144, 149, 196, 201, 274
modernism, in art, 3–5, 14, 28, 30, 41–42, 44–49, 60n14, 61n23, 70–73, 80, 97, 153–58, 175, 179, 274, 277

Nancy, Jean-Luc, 11–14, 66, 112, 276; art and language, 211–12, 237n62, 244; community, 122n189; image, 258–61; plurality of arts, 24–35, 78–79, 91, 102, 104, 108, 115n60, 119n110, 119n112, 123n209, 123n215, 125, 164–67, 173, 175, 178, 195, 201, 232, 245–46; theory of form, 50–53, 76, 104, 183n76
nature, 44, 46–47, 58, 125, 127, 151, 168, 202, 222–23
negative aesthetics, 58, 70, 164
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 4, 225
Novalis, 79

Ogier, Pascale, 148
ontology, 19, 48–49, 52, 70–72, 88, 108–9, 128, 145, 169–73; of art, 21–29, 141–45, 155, 159–62, 173–79, 236n40, 245–46; Plato's, 43
originary mimesis, 5, 27–29. *See also* Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe; mimesis
outwork. *See hors-d'œuvre*

painting, 19, 23–24, 27–31, 70–74, 81–113, 152–79, 195–214
parergon, 58, 69, 81, 86–113, 144, 164–68, 247–50, 252. *See also* frame
passe-partout, 86–102, 128, 131, 136–37. *See also* frame; *parergon*
performativity, 17, 92–94, 119n114, 200, 207–12
phantasm, 143, 148–49, 209, 228, 259
pharmakon, 76, 230–31
phenomenology, 11–12, 48–49, 76, 123n192, 146–48, 151–52, 164, 227–28, 276
philosophy of art, 6, 15–21, 66–67, 70–74, 99, 102, 157–60, 273–78; G. W. F. Hegel's, 46–48, 126; Immanuel Kant's, 47, 52–53, 57–58, 61n23, 70,

82, 86–92, 95–102, 110–11, 113n22, 117n89, 118n92, 157, 159, 196–97, 226, 235n23, 247–48; Jean-Luc Nancy's, 24–27; Martin Heidegger's, 16–17, 54–58, 69–70, 76–79, 93, 99–102, 122n189, 127–29, 149, 162–67, 204–6, 215n15; Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's, 27–29
photography, 32–33, 130, 140–52, 233, 248, 254–55, 264–65
pictogram, 105, 251–53, 269n67
Plato, 22, 28–29, 37n24, 41–44, 48, 60n1, 63n61, 85, 111, 117n82, 141, 151–52, 202, 209, 222–23, 230–32
Poetics, Aristotle's, 222–23
poetry, 27, 46, 79, 167, 196, 213, 242, 248; in Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art,* 16, 163, 252–53
politics, 25, 61n30, 156, 157, 160, 177–79, 277–78
portrait, 25, 27, 29–35, 139–40, 232, 260–61; self-portrait, 31–33, 139, 260
postmodernism, 175, 274
post-phenomenology, 3, 72–73, 80, 96
poststructuralism, 8–9, 13, 42, 77, 80–83, 224–25
presentation, 14, 18–19, 29–35, 57–58, 70, 79, 83–84, 93, 108, 111–12, 123n209, 132, 135, 137, 147, 163–64, 201–7, 213, 221–34, 236n40, 243–47, 249–53
printmaking, 126, 137–38, 203
proper name, 16–17, 118n104, 195, 202–3, 207–14. *See also* signature
prosthesis, 54, 119n112, 217n68, 242

reference, structure of, 20–22, 34, 46, 59–60, 76–77, 79, 82, 117n71, 127, 133, 140–43, 146–47, 162–63, 171–73, 212, 229–33, 243–44, 254, 260; in painting, 171–73; in photography, 140–50, 254
remainder, logic of, 81–86, 99, 110–11, 134, 171, 174, 195, 209, 252. *See also parergon*; supplement
remnants. *See* remainder, logic of
repetition, 17, 19, 27, 32, 57, 103–4, 132, 142–44, 147, 171–74, 196, 217n58, 224, 227–30, 243, 265–66, 273; and difference, 196, 217n58; origin of meaning in, 132, 143–44, 202
representation, 17, 20, 25, 29, 46–48, 54–55, 57, 59, 61n30, 72, 88, 90–96, 126, 129, 135, 140–41, 145, 152, 159, 162, 165–66, 171–75, 201–4, 221–34, 236n40, 239–48, 258, 263–66, 277–78
Romanticism, 4, 8, 25, 28, 50, 73, 79, 177, 247
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 168
ruins, ontology of, 32, 34, 78, 115n60, 166–67, 245, 260–61, 264

Saussure, Ferdinand de, 109–10, 132, 225–26
Schapiro, Meyer, 54, 151, 204–6
Schelling, F. W. J., 48, 62n41, 79
self-portrait. *See* portrait
seriality, 56, 144–45, 171–73, 178, 204–5, 217n58. *See also* citation; repetition
signature, 16, 17, 23, 50, 95, 97, 162, 195–97, 200–202, 207–14. *See also* proper name
simulacrum, 31, 143, 147–48, 210–11, 230–31, 239, 259, 269n66
singularity, 11–14, 23–27, 34, 50–51, 67, 74–75, 79–80, 88, 102–5, 112, 131, 142–45, 149–57, 171–74, 195–97, 203, 207, 214, 248–49, 265
skiagraphia. See writing of shadow and light
spacing, 17–18, 21–24, 51, 56–57, 85, 110–11, 131–37, 164–65, 212, 229. *See also* spatiality
spatial arts *(arts de l'espace),* 17–18
spatiality, 18, 37n24, 99, 130–31, 136–37, 146, 180n22, 198, 211–12, 227–29. *See also différance*; *khôra; trait*

spectrality, 32, 130, 137, 143–50, 164, 172, 216n49, 232–33, 259–60. *See also* ghost
speech act theory, 92–93, 119n114, 208–10
structuralism, 82–83, 96, 120n131, 224
subjectile, 103–5, 173–74, 248–49
subjectivity, 44, 47–49, 52–53, 58, 66, 70, 73, 79, 98–99, 179, 193n287, 223, 253, 266n1
sublime, 42, 57–58, 70, 100–101, 164, 201
supplement, 26–27, 54, 81–104, 168, 200–202, 210, 254. *See also* context; *hors-d'œuvre*
symbol, 25, 33, 105, 215n26, 240, 243, 248, 255, 269n66

technique, 71, 101–2, 107, 115n56, 138, 153–55, 176, 192n272, 203–4, 275
temporalization, 37n24, 136, 202, 205, 229. *See also différance*; *khôra*; spacing
text, 11–24, 26, 32–34, 52, 71, 77, 82, 88–90, 107, 109–11, 129–30, 133, 147, 153, 200–201, 208–9, 213, 226, 231–32, 252, 257, 261–63, 266, 275. *See also* context; textuality
textuality, 4, 15–21, 34, 66, 77, 117n71, 174, 246, 248, 273
Titus-Carmel, Gérard, 72, 178, *194*, 201–4, 206, 209, 252, 265, 275
touching, 164–65, 182n67, 249, 276–77
trace, 15–23, 27, 29, 34–35, 48–57, 63n72, 74–91, 106–7, 110, 120n123, 126–52, 164, 167–71, 173–75, 197–205, 213–14, 227–29, 233, 244, 247, 260–66
trait, 18–23, 71–72, 92–95, 125–79, 198–201, 213, 228, 233–34, 245–46, 255–57, 263–66
truth, 28, 68, 77, 92–94, 167–71, 204–6, 208

undecidability, 19, 24, 76, 86, 88, 93, 96–97, 112, 118n100, 229–32, 242, 273

van Gogh, Vincent, 54–55, 99–101, 108–12, 122n189, 128, 151, 165–66, 204–6, 215n15, 232
video art, 147–48
visual arts, 1–7, 14–20, 61n14, 71, 74, 112, 140, 153, 167, 232, 254
visuality, 17, 23, 130, 239, 276
Vorstellung, 91, 95, 236n40. *See also* representation

worklessness. *See désœuvrement*
work of art: concept of, 11–40; deconstruction of, 66–81, 88, 101, 107–8, 139, 166, 213–14, 247; and language, 195–214; limits of, 65–113; subject of, 29–35, 53–54, 84, 99–100, 103–7, 111, 131, 137, 147, 159–62, 201–7, 211, 233–34, 260–61
writing, 3, 7, 12–13, 15–24, 26–30, 42, 48, 52, 56–60, 69–70, 72, 82–86, 89–90; arche-writing, 20–21, 127, 228; of shadow and light *(skiagraphia),* 141–42, 144, 151–52, 233; and the visual, 52, 66, 69–70, 74–78, 130, 154–55, 163, 166, 170, 174, 183n69, 185n111, 199–200, 245–46, 251–53, 261, 264, 266, 268n48, 270n114

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